

ETHNOGRAPHIC SURVEY OF AFRICA

EDITED BY DARVILL FORDE

WESTERN AFRICA

PART XIII

THE BENIN KINGDOM
AND THE EDO-SPEAKING PEOPLES
OF SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIA

BY

R. E. BRADBURY

The Benin Kingdom; the Ishan; the Northern Edo;
the Urhobo and Isoko of the Niger Delta

together with a section on

THE ITSEKIRI

BY

P. G. LLOYD

LONDON

INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN INSTITUTE

1957

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THE BENIN KINGDOM AND THE EDO-SPEAKING PEOPLES OF SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIA

The following corrections should be made:

p. 18	oviba	should read	oviba
p. 21, 67	Ovarau	" "	Ovarau
p. 26, 56-7, 99	ovia)	" "	ovia
	ovia)		
p. 27	erha u-odede	" "	erha u-odede
	iye u-odede	" "	iye u-odede
	ovoxa	" "	ovoxa
p. 95, 96,	117-19, 129-51	<u>passin</u>	
	Ovia (pl. ivie)	" "	Ovie (pl. ivie)
p. 37	exave, exave	" "	exave
p. 96	ovishago, oviakpe	" "	ovishago, viakpe
p. 109 (fn)	ahiaue	" "	ahiaue
p. 110	Eke	" "	Eke
	Osoo	" "	osoo
p. 112	Ekpese	" "	Ekpessa
p. 119	ivialagi	" "	ivialagi
p. 131	Emev	" "	Emev
p. 133	ave	" "	ave
p. 136	onivo	" "	onivo
	osoo	" "	osoo
p. 138	akpoko-ologu	" "	akpoko-olotu
p. 140-61	<u>passin</u> ooo, ooo	" "	ovo
p. 141	osivie	" "	osivie
p. 149	ovis	" "	ovis
p. 155	ikova	" "	ikova
p. 160	igbeleve	" "	igbeleve
p. 162	obueva	" "	obueva
p. 20, 36, 40-1, 44.	The title Ogiave is better spelt Ogiame		

- p. 28, l. 4. Unmarried sons should read married sons
- p. 44, l. 38. Oil " "soil
- p. 66, fn 8. Last sentence should read: The population density must be somewhat lower.
- p. 84, table. Each of the Iybie-Inion tribes appears to consist of a single settlement of 3 wards rather than 3 separate villages.
- p. 128, l. 13. Owerri Province should read Rivers Province.
- p. 131, l. 16. Benin-speakers " " Edo-speakers.

Map between pp. 164-5

Uhobe (Sobe), west of Auchi in Kukuruku Division, should be in the south-east corner of Owo Division.

The hatching for Etsako should be extended east as far as the Niger:

- " " " Ishan south-west to the border of Asaba Division:
- " " " Urhobo should cover the area between Idjerhe, Uvbie and Agbon.

Inyelen, south-east of the Ishan area, should be deleted.

FOREWORD

THE International African Institute has, since 1945, been engaged on the preparation and publication of an Ethnographic Survey of Africa, the purpose of which is to present in a brief and readily comprehensible form a summary of available information concerning the different peoples of Africa with respect to location, natural environment, economy and crafts, social structure, political organization, religious beliefs and cults. While available published material has provided the basis for the Survey, a mass of unpublished documents, reports and records in government files and in the archives of missionary societies, as well as field notes and special communications by anthropologists and others, have been generously made available and these have been supplemented by personal correspondence and consultation. The Survey is being published in a number of separate volumes, each of which is concerned with one people or a group of related peoples, and contains a comprehensive bibliography and specially drawn map.

A committee of the Institute was set up under the Chairmanship of Professor Radcliffe-Brown to determine the scope and general arrangement and the Director of the Institute undertook the editing of the Survey. The generous collaboration of a number of research institutions and administrative officers in Europe and in the African territories has been secured, as well as the services of senior anthropologists who have been good enough to supervise and amplify the drafts.

The work of the Survey was initiated with the aid of a grant from the British Colonial Development and Welfare Funds, on the recommendation of the Social Science Research Council, to be applied mainly though not exclusively to work relating to British territories. A further grant from the Sudan Government has assisted in the preparation and publication of sections dealing with that territory.

The Ministère de la France d'Outre-Mer and the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire were good enough to express their interest in the project and through their good offices grants have been received from the Governments of French West Africa and the French Cameroons for the preparation and publication of sections relating to those areas. These sections have been for the most part prepared by French ethnologists with the support and advice of the late Professor M. Griaule of the Sorbonne, Mme Calame-Griaule, and Professor Th. Monod, Director of I.F.A.N.

The collaboration of the Belgian authorities in this project was first secured by the good offices of the late Professor de Jonghe, who enlisted the interest of the Commission d'Ethnologie of the Institut Royal Colonial Belge. The collaboration of the Institut pour la Recherche Scientifique en Afrique Centrale has also been readily accorded. Work relating to Belgian territories is being carried out with the collaboration of Professor Olbrechts at the Centre de Documentation of the Musée du Congo Belge, Tervuren, where Mlle Boone and members of her staff are engaged on the assembly and classification of the vast mass of material relating to African peoples in the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi. They are working in close collaboration with ethnologists in the field to whom draft manuscripts are submitted for checking.

The International African Institute desires to express its grateful thanks to those official bodies whose generous financial assistance has made the carrying out of this project possible and to the many scholars, directors of research organizations, administrative officers, missionaries, and others who have collaborated in the work and, by granting facilities to our research workers and by correcting and supervising their manuscripts, have contributed so largely to whatever merit the various sections may possess.

Since the unequal value and unsystematic nature of existing material was one of the reasons for undertaking the Survey, it is obvious that these studies cannot claim to be complete or definitive; it is hoped, however, that they will present a

clear account of our existing knowledge and indicate where information is lacking and further research is needed.

It will be apparent from the bibliography of this section that despite the fame of the sculptural art of Benin and the considerable travel literature on Benin City, there has hitherto been very little scholarly work and publication on the culture and social institutions of the kingdom or of the other Edo-speaking peoples. The present account benefits from the lengthy and intensive field studies of its author and represents a preliminary outline of the results of his researches so far. Dr. Bradbury's first fieldwork in the Benin kingdom was undertaken in 1951-2 as a Horniman Student of the Royal Anthropological Institute and was resumed over the period 1952-4 as a Research Fellow of this Institute, engaged on a project for the study of African social and religious values for which finances had been generously provided by U.N.E.S.C.O.

During these three years, while working most intensively in the capital and in the villages of the kingdom, he made an ethnographic reconnaissance of the other Edo-speaking groups.

Dr. Bradbury has recently been appointed Senior Social Anthropologist on a further project for research into the history of Benin which is being carried out under the auspices of the Department of History of the University College of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Mr. P. C. Lloyd's account of the Itsekiri is also based mainly on his own field investigations among these people in 1955-6 as a Research Officer of the West African Institute of Social and Economic Research, to whom our thanks are due.

Dr. Bradbury acknowledges with gratitude the help given to him by the *Oba* of Benin, Chief J. U. Egharevba, the chiefs and people, in the preparation of the section dealing with the Benin kingdom, and by informants from the other areas covered by this Survey. Special thanks are also due to Dr. J. W. Welch who allowed the use of material from his unpublished thesis on the Isoko, to the Rev. J. W. Hubbard and Mr. A. Salubi, who supplied additional material and corrections, and to Lieut-Col. A. R. A. de Garston, Fr. J. J. Healy, Mr. A. Hunt-Cooke, Mr. M. O. Ighrakpata, Mr. J. Macrae Simpson, Dr. Christopher Okojie, Mr. H. Okiokio, and Dr. Hans Wolff, all of whom kindly assisted in various ways.

A list of sections already published in this Survey will be found on pp. 211-12 of this volume.

DARYLL FORDE,

Director,

International African Institute.

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INTRODUCTION

This volume deals with the Edo-speaking peoples of the Benin, Delta, and Ondo Provinces of Western Nigeria and the Rivers Province of Eastern Nigeria.¹ A section has also been included on the Itsekiri or Jekri² who, although they speak a Yoruba dialect, claim descent from an early *Oba* of Benin, and whose culture owes much to Bini, Urhobo, and Ijaw influences.

As far as it is possible to judge from the 1952 Census bulletins³ there were about 987,000 Edo-speaking peoples in the Benin, Delta, and Ondo Provinces of Western Nigeria, with a further 60,000 living in other parts of the Colony and Protectorate. Their "homeland" is located in the Benin, Ishan, and Kukuruku Divisions of Benin Province and the northern half of Delta Province with local extensions into Ondo Province on the west and Rivers Province on the south-east. Of the 53,000 Edo-speakers in Ondo Province over 43,000 are Urhobo and Isoko, three-quarters of whom live in the Okitipupa Division. Most of these have taken up temporary or semi-permanent residence there during the present century in connection with the exploitation of oil-palm resources.

For descriptive purposes the Edo-speaking peoples can be divided into four main territorial sections which are distinct from each other in certain linguistic, social, and other cultural features.

I. The Edo proper (Bini) of the Benin Kingdom, here taken to be broadly coterminous with the present-day Benin Division. Of a total population of 292,000 for the Division 203,000 are said to speak Edo (possibly including small numbers of Ishan and Northern Edo—see below) and 22,000 Urhobo-Isoko. The inhabitants of the villages which make up the Benin Confederation to the west of the Silluko River in Okitipupa Division speak Edo and are probably most closely connected with this section of the Edo-speaking peoples.

II. The Ishan, to the north-east of the Benin Kingdom, mainly in Ishan Division. There are said to be about 183,000 Edo-speakers in this Division with a further 1,500 Ishan-speakers in the Kukuruku Division.

III. The Northern Edo who form the great bulk of the population of Kukuruku Division and overlap into the Owo Division of Ondo Province. They are here divided into four groups:—

A. The Iybiosakon, in the south-western sector of Kukuruku Division and including the inhabitants of Sobu and Ijagha in Owo Division. They number about 53,000.

B. The Etsako (88,000) in the eastern sector of the same Division.

C. The North-West Edo (46,000) in the north-western sector.

D. The Ineme (about 6,000) who live in a number of scattered villages in the Etsako and North-West Edo areas, and have further settlements east of the Niger.

IV. The Urhobo and Isoko of the Niger Delta in Delta Province with outlying pockets, probably Isoko in character, in Rivers Province. The Urhobo-Isoko in Delta Province number about 340,000. According to the Census bulletin for Rivers Province there were about 5,680 Engenni; these probably represent the bulk of Edo-speakers there.

The term "Edo-speaking peoples" appears to have been first used by N. W. Thomas who carried out ethnographic investigations in Nigeria in the early years of

¹ There is no detailed information concerning the Edo-speaking peoples of the Rivers Province. According to Talbot (*The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, vol. IV, pp. 37 and 42, maps) they occur in four or five small pockets surrounded by Ibo and Ijaw speakers, and speak Isoko dialects (see below). Dr. Hans Wolff, of the University of Puerto Rico, who carried out linguistic studies in Nigeria in 1953-4, confirms, in a personal communication, that Edo dialects are still spoken around Degema.

² See pp. 172-205.

³ The arbitrary nature of the classification into "tribal groups" employed in the Census makes it difficult to estimate populations accurately.

the century. It is derived from *Edo*, the vernacular name of Benin City, and is applied to those who speak either Edo proper (*Bini*)*—the language of Benin City and kingdom—or closely related dialects, as a first language. The Edo language and dialects belong to the Kwa group of Western Sudanic languages.² There is, however, no approach to mutual intelligibility between Edo and the neighbouring Kwa languages, Yoruba, Igbera, Igala, Ibo, and Ijaw, though frontier populations are frequently bilingual.

Dr. Hans Wolff, in a personal communication, has suggested that the Edo languages and dialects fall into two major divisions:—

I. Edo proper and the Ishan and Northern Edo dialects.

II. The Urhobo and Isoko dialects.

It is possible, however, that some Northern Edo and Urhobo-Isoko dialects have archaic features in common which are absent from Edo proper. The latter is spoken throughout the Benin kingdom with only minor variations and on that account is here termed a "language." The remaining dialects are of a more limited distribution and there appears to be a tendency for the linguistic unit to be co-extensive with the autonomous or semi-autonomous political unit. Thus among the North-West Edo where the autonomous group is usually a single settlement there are marked variations in vocabulary from settlement to settlement. The dialects of Ishan and the southern part of Ivbiosakon seem most closely akin to Edo proper while mutual intelligibility with the latter diminishes towards the northern boundaries of Edo-speaking territory. To the south of the Benin kingdom the dialects of the most northerly Urhobo tribes are somewhat influenced by Edo proper but generally speaking the Urhobo-Isoko dialects are quite unintelligible to the people of the Benin kingdom.

The size of autonomous political units varies over a very wide range, the Benin kingdom being by far the largest. The present-day Benin Division covers 4,000 square miles and has a population of just under 300,000 Edo and non-Edo. Before 1897, when Benin City was captured by a British punitive expedition, the rule of the *Oba* of Benin also extended, with varying effectiveness, over most Ishan and Ivbiosakon communities, parts of the Urhobo-Isoko area and over certain Yoruba and Ibo populations to the west and east respectively. Thus the present-day kingdom is only the nucleus of the former Benin empire. No other autonomous group approaches this size. The Ishan are divided into about 35 independent single- or multi-village chiefdoms—the typical units—and tribes,³ with populations varying from about 400 to nearly 37,000. Of the Northern Edo groups the Ivbiosakon (excluding those in Owo Division) consist of 17 single- or multi-village tribes with populations of from about 100 to more than 8,000 and the Etsako of nine multi-village chiefdoms and tribes of from 5,000 to 18,000 people. The North-West Edo are still further fragmented, comprising 28 independent single- or dual-village settlements with populations of from about 300 to 6,500, while the largest of the 10 scattered

* "*Bini*" is used by Europeans as an adjective and for the dominant people of the Benin kingdom and their language.

² See Westermann, 1926.

³ For the purpose of this Survey a chiefdom is defined as an independent or semi-independent political unit with a hereditary chief; a tribe is a similar unit without a hereditary chief. The word "independent" as used here must be explained. Before 1897 most of Ishan and some of the Ivbiosakon and Urhobo-Isoko groups recognized the political suzerainty of the *Oba* of Benin—as distinct from his spiritual authority which extended over wider areas—to a greater or lesser degree and during the latter part of the 19th century most of the Northern Edo came under the rule of the Emir of Bida. The political controls exercised from Benin and Bida were, however, limited and within the Ishan, Northern Edo, and Urhobo-Isoko areas there were many autonomous groups which did not recognize the legitimate suzerainty of any other. At the present day the political authority of the *Oba* and the Emir is not recognized over these areas. Independence of chiefdoms and tribes must now, however, be understood to be relative only to one another within the framework of the Divisional, Provincial, and Regional government of Nigeria.

Ineme villages has a population of probably not more than 1,500 people. There are about 35 Urhobo and Isoko chiefdoms and tribes with populations varying from less than 500 to more than 30,000.

Despite this diversity of political scale, unpublished and published sources, and especially the works of N. W. Thomas (see bibliography), indicate that, apart from their linguistic affinities, the Edo-speaking peoples as a whole exhibit many common and distinctive cultural features. It is impossible to summarize and assess the evidence for this at this point, but it may be of some value to indicate a few typical features of Edo social organization.

The compact village settlement is everywhere the basic unit of the political organization. In many cases, especially among the North-West Edo and Ineme, single villages constitute autonomous political units. Otherwise they are arranged in village-groups, tribes, and chiefdoms. The Benin kingdom consists of the capital, Benin City, and several hundred villages which may either form separate units *vis-à-vis* the central authority or be co-ordinated in village-groups or sub-chiefdoms. Villages everywhere break down into wards, of which there may be several tiers, and these in turn are made up of one or more extended families with patrilineal nuclei. The degree to which local groups larger than the extended family are associated with lineages appears to vary considerably.

A second characteristic feature of Edo social organization is the stratification of the male population into age-grades organized on a village-wide basis. Almost everywhere—the North-West Edo and northern Igbiosakon (where there is a great elaboration of age-grade and age-set organization) provide the exception—there are three main grades comprising youths, adult men, and elders; and the corresponding grades in each section of the Edo-speaking peoples perform similar functions. In most areas authority within the village is vested very largely in the senior age-grade (usually called *eddi*) and, subject to certain qualifications, the oldest man is the village headman. This pattern of authority is, however, sometimes upset by the presence of title-associations or of individual titled offices (see below).

Thirdly, the Edo-speaking peoples universally show not only a marked patrilineal bias in their kinship and lineage organization, but also an emphasis on primogeniture. Almost everywhere the senior surviving son of a dead man is regarded as the chief heir to his property and the successor to whatever offices, privileges, and duties he may have had. Hereditary titled offices, where present, pass from the last incumbent to his senior son. Where rights of other children to a share in their father's property are recognized, the children of each mother generally form a distinct group for this purpose.

Other features of Edo social organization are less general. The Etsako and some of the Ishan, like the Ijaw of the Niger Delta, have a system of differential marriage-payments. A full marriage-payment secures the affiliation of all children of the marriage to the husband's lineage while with smaller payments the children either go to the wife's father's lineage or are divided between the two groups. Further investigation is necessary to determine to what extent these arrangements modify the normal patrilineal kinship system of the Edo. Among some North-West Edo groups there is evidence of a double descent system whereby every individual belongs both to a localized patrilineage and to a dispersed matrilineal group.

The three-tier age-grade system common to nearly all the Edo has already been mentioned. Everywhere except the Benin kingdom there are formal age-sets, new ones being organized at more or less regular intervals, which proceed through the grades as groups. Among the Urhobo and Isoko there are parallel grades for women. The age-grade and set system achieves its most extreme development among some of the Northern Igbiosakon and North-West Edo where the number of grades is greater and their political functions and ritual activities are more elaborate. In this feature these groups show an affinity with neighbouring Akoko and North-East Yoruba peoples.

The Edo-speaking peoples exhibit a remarkable variety of political structures. Age-grades, hereditary rulership with its attendant institutions, and title associations all play an important part in the ascription of political authority. It is possible to make a conceptual distinction between three main types of political system among the Edo in each of which one of these three kinds of institutions predominates; though elements of all three are present in the political structures of most autonomous groups.

The political functions of the senior age-grade at the village level have already been referred to. Within the Benin kingdom and in other chiefdoms and tribes authority over a number of villages may be vested in their combined senior age-grades or in the leaders of those grades. Finally, even at the level of an autonomous tribe or chiefdom, authority may be vested mainly in the age-grade organization. This seems to be particularly true of some Northern Ivbiosakon and North-West Edo groups where the normal Edo age-grade organization is considerably elaborated. Generally speaking, however, at the level of the independent tribe or chiefdom one of the other types of authoritative institution becomes significant.

Hereditary rulers are characteristic of the Benin and Ishan sections of the Edo-speaking peoples and are found among some of the Urhobo, Isoko, and Etsako. They are absent from the Ivbiosakon and largely so from the rest of the Northern Edo though there has been a tendency for hereditary chieftainship to appear as a result of Nupe and British influence during the last hundred years. Where hereditary chieftainship is fully developed, that is in the Benin kingdom (both at the kingdom level and in sub-chiefdoms) and the Ishan chiefdoms, it is accompanied by a system of state ranks and titles. There may be both hereditary and non-hereditary titles and these may be organized into a number of corporate groups. Appointment to non-hereditary titles and succession to hereditary ones must be confirmed by the king or chief and it is through their holders that he exercises his authority over his subjects.

This kind of system is found at its most elaborate in the Benin kingdom itself. The Ishan chiefdoms, some of the sub-chiefdoms within the Benin kingdom, and, to a lesser extent, some Urhobo and Isoko groups with hereditary rulers, reflect the Benin pattern in simplified forms and on a smaller scale. It remains arguable whether Benin represents an extreme elaboration of a pattern already existing among the Edo-speaking peoples before the first establishment of the Yoruba dynasty at Benin (35 reigns ago) or whether, on the other hand, this pattern was evolved at Benin and later copied by neighbouring groups. Local traditions, for the most part, support the latter theory in the sense that the ruling groups of all other chiefdoms claim Benin origin during the present dynasty. In Benin itself, however, there are traditions of an elaborate state system preceding the present dynasty and a number of chiefdoms within the Benin kingdom assert that they were organized as such before being incorporated into the Benin state. It is true, moreover, that the Benin political system differs markedly from the organization of the Yoruba kingdoms, though Yoruba, and particularly Ife, influence was formerly very great. Whatever the origin of the Benin type of political structure, however, it is clear that it has served as a continuing model for the Ishan chiefdoms and for the few well-organized Urhobo chiefdoms as well as for the western Ibo; the title-systems of Onitsha and Aboh are also clearly of Benin origin.

The term "title-association" is used here to describe an association which can be entered by any freeborn male of the community for which it is operative by the payment of fees to the existing members and by participating in certain rites. Membership gives certain privileges and duties, including the right to use the title common to all members. In some of these associations the leading members have individual titles but the title of the association itself is common property. Title-associations have many functions. Politically, however, they are most important where hereditary chieftainship is lacking, that is among the Northern Edo and Urhobo-Isoko; they are lacking in the Benin kingdom and, for the most part in

Ishan. In the areas where they provide the basis of the political system membership is essential for any person wishing to exercise political authority; seniority is generally reckoned by "title-age", that is by relative date of admission to the association. Title-associations thus serve to modify the tendency, among the Edo-speaking peoples, for legitimate authority to be concentrated in the hands of the oldest people, and they provide an alternative to the "state" form of organization.

It will be clear that the Benin kingdom is an exceptional feature in the social organization of the Edo-speaking peoples as a whole. Politically it is comparable to the Yoruba and Dahomey kingdoms to the west while the remainder of the Edo-speaking peoples are in their political and social organization more akin to the Ibo and Ijaw peoples to the east and south. The Edo-speaking peoples, with the sole exception of Benin City (population 54,000), are a "village" people in contrast to the highly urbanized Yoruba. Thus, in terms of social and political organization, as well as geographically, the Edo-speaking peoples stand in an intermediate position between the smaller scale societies of eastern Nigeria and the more highly organized political groups to the west.

NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

In Section I of this volume and wherever possible in other sections, vernacular names and terms are written phonetically. In Sections II, III, and IV it has not been possible to obtain the correct pronunciation of all vernacular words, many of which have been taken from written sources only. In these sections the italicizing of a word does not necessarily indicate that it is written phonetically.

e represents an "open" *e* as in *get*.

ɔ represents an "open" *o* as in *got*.

- indicates nasalization.

gʰ represents velar fricative, voiced.

x (or *hʰ*) represents velar fricative, unvoiced.

rʰ represents aspirated *r*.

v represents bilabial fricative. This phoneme is nasalized when placed next to a nasal vowel.

I. THE BENIN KINGDOM

LOCATION AND NOMENCLATURE

For the purposes of this Survey the Benin kingdom is regarded as being coterminous with the present-day Benin Division, the unit over which the authority of the *Oba* (king) was recognized after the restoration of 1914. The Edo of this area represent the solid core of the old Benin empire and, apart from minor revolts, they have given allegiance to the *Oba* over a period of probably not less than 450 years—and possibly for very much longer.

The total area of the Benin Division is about 4,000 square miles and the population, according to the 1952 Census, was about 292,000 of whom 203,000 are classified as Edo (excluding *Urhobo* and *Isoko*). Of the remainder the largest linguistic groups were *Ibo*, 49,000—mostly *Ika*-speakers on the eastern borders of the kingdom, and *Kwale* in camps on the river banks; *Urhobo-Isoko*, 22,000, living in permanent villages along the southern borders and in semi-permanent and temporary camps along the rivers; and *Yoruba*, 7,500. In addition there are a number of permanent *Itsekiri* settlements in the south and south-west and some *Ijaw* villages in the swampy south-west and west. Permanent non-Edo villages stand in much the same relation to the central authority of the kingdom as do Edo villages. More temporary settlements are usually attached to Benin villages.

There is no satisfactory vernacular term to designate the Benin kingdom or its people. Benin City is called *Edo* by its inhabitants and in certain contexts individuals from all parts of the kingdom will refer to themselves as *oviedo* (child of *Edo*) or *ovioaba* (*Oba*'s subject). More specifically the same individual speaks of himself as "a child of" his village or village-group or of the region of the kingdom in which he lives. The major "regions" are defined by the people in terms of the main rivers; thus, for example, *iyek-Ovia* (trans-*Ovia*), *iyek-Orhio*, and *iyek-Ogba* refer to the groups on the farther side of (*iyek*—"at the back of") these rivers from Benin City. "Benin" is a non-Edo word of doubtful origin; except in reference to the Division and Province of that name it will be restricted in this Survey to the people of the kingdom and their capital.

There is marked uniformity in culture, social organization, and language over the whole kingdom, derived in part, no doubt, from the overriding centralizing authority of Benin City.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The Benin country is a low-lying plain covered with porous Benin sand, and rising to the north to the *Ishan* plateau. There are no outstanding physical features and no solid rocks near the surface. The area is drained by a series of deeply-entrenched rivers and small streams flowing in a general north-south direction. The Edo villages generally avoid close proximity to these streams though the *Urhobo-Isoko* and *Kwale* build on their banks.

The natural vegetation of the area is high tropical rain forest with a good deal of swamp vegetation in the south and west. The greater part of the country is now under secondary bush though there is still an abundance of good timber and nearly 40% of the area is in timber reserves.

DEMOGRAPHY

Apart from the capital, Benin City, which to-day has a population of nearly 54,000, the people of the Benin kingdom live in several hundred compact village settlements ranging in size from 20 or 30 to more than 4,000 inhabitants. Of 637 villages two have more than 4,000 inhabitants, 13 between 2,000 and 4,000, 49 between 1,000 and 2,000, and 571 less than 1,000.¹ Many villages are independent political units under the central authority; others are grouped into chiefdoms or into village-groups without hereditary headmen (see p. 33).

The overall population density for Benin Division in 1952 was about 73 per square mile, but the population is by no means evenly distributed throughout the area. A high proportion of the country is in forest reserves and thus closed to farming. On the other hand more than a sixth of the people are concentrated in Benin City and a high proportion of these are engaged in non-agricultural pursuits. The lowest densities are to be found in the west and south-west and the central area while the highest are on the eastern borders of the Division. There is, however, no serious land shortage in most settled areas.

TRADITIONS OF ORIGIN AND HISTORY²

In contrast with all other Edo-speaking areas there are many villages in the Benin kingdom whose inhabitants have no tradition that their ancestors came from elsewhere. Some informants speak vaguely of a general migration from the east and others trace everything back to Ife—a tendency which may simply follow from the fact that Ife is the accepted origin of the present ruling dynasty. In Benin City certain wards claim to have been on the spot "from the beginning" but most of the remainder say that their founders came from Ife as followers of the father of the first *Oba* or at a later date.

According to Edo mythology, the Benin kingdom was founded by the youngest of the children of *Osanobua* (the high god). With his senior brothers, who included the first kings of Ife and other Yoruba kingdoms and the first king of "the Europeans," he was sent to live in the world (*agb5*). Each was allowed to take something with him. Some chose wealth, material and magical skills or implements but, on the instructions of a bird, the youngest chose a snail shell. When they arrived in the world they found it covered with water. The youngest son was told by the bird to upturn the snail shell and when he did so sand fell from it and spread out to form the land. So the first *Oba* of Benin became the owner of the land and his senior "brothers" had to come to him and barter their possessions in return for a place to settle. Hence, though he was the youngest son, he became the wealthiest and most powerful ruler.

The semi-mythical rulers of the first dynasty are known as *ogiso* (*ogie*—ruler, king; *iso*—the sky). They feature in many folk tales, talking with personified animals, plants, and material objects and matching their wits against the trickster animal, *egwi*, the tortoise. The names of a number of them, some of them women, are remembered, as are some of the titles of chiefs of their court, the original site of which is still pointed out within the walls of the present town. The rule of the *ogiso* is said to have been ended by a revolt and for a time Edo, then called *Igodomigodo*, had no royal rulers.

¹ These figures are derived from the 1952 census. In some cases the unit designated "village" may not correspond to the definition of a village given on p. 31.

² It is not practicable to give references for all the sources of information used in this section. A detailed bibliography is given on pp. 165-6.

Finally the chiefs decided to send to the *Oni* of Ife asking him to provide one of his sons to rule over them. He sent one *Araminya* who, however, after staying at Benin for some time, decided that only a native could rule the Edo. So he impregnated the daughter of the *onogie* of Ego, a village about five miles west of Benin City, and returned to Ife. This woman bore a son who was eventually installed as the *Oba* and who is now known as *Eweka I*. The present *Oba*, *Akērna II*, is, according to tradition, the 35th of the dynasty whose beginning is variously dated from the late 12th century to the beginning of the 14th century. The 15th *Oba* in the generally accepted list is said to have been reigning when the Portuguese first visited Benin in 1485.³

The first three kings are said to have lived at Usama, between the two walls on the western side of Benin City where the installation of a new *Oba* still takes place (see p. 40). The fourth, *Ewedo*, after a struggle with an independent chief, *Ogiāwē*, established himself on the site of the modern palace; the battle with *Ogiāwē* is re-enacted at the accession of each *Oba* and ends with a ritual division of the land between the two. The next *Oba*, *Oguola*, is credited with the building of the main wall round the city. If this tradition is correct it suggests that Benin was a considerable town even at this early date. There is, however, no historical evidence as to the area or population over which the early kings ruled. Egharevba (*Short History of Benin*, p. 12) says that the main enemy at this time was Udo, a town in the Benin kingdom about 30 miles west of Benin City. Brass-casting is said to have been introduced from Ife during this reign.

The 15th and 16th centuries were apparently the period of greatest expansion and it was during this time that the great warrior kings, *Ewuare*, *Ozolua*, *Esigie*, *Orhogbua*, and *Ehēgbuda* reigned. D'Aveiro, who visited Benin City in 1485, reported that the accession of a new *Oba* had to be approved by a king *Ogane* (presumably the *Oni* of Ife whom the Edo still call *Oghene*) who lived far away in the interior. D'Aveiro returned to Portugal with the chief of *Ughotō* (Gwatto), the village which was to become the port of Benin, as the *Oba*'s ambassador, then went back to Benin to establish a trading factory at *Ughotō*.⁴

Catholic missions were established by the Portuguese early in the 16th century. Firearms were introduced about the same time and seem to have led to an increase in warfare whose purpose was the capture of slaves for export. *Esigie*, in about 1515, was accompanied by Portuguese missionaries in a campaign which drove the marauders from Idah to the north back across the Niger.⁵ Local traditions say that this *Oba* also dealt successfully with the attempt of his brother *Arhuanā* to set up a rival kingdom with its centre at Udo to the west of the *Ovia* (Osse) River.

Churches were built by the Portuguese in Benin City. In 1516 "in the month of August, the King ordered his son and two of his greatest noblemen to become Christians and built a church in Benin and they learnt how to read and did it very well"; (from Portuguese MSS. quoted by Ling Roth, p. 6). This appears to agree with Egharevba's statement that *Esigie*'s son who succeeded him with the name *Orhogbua* was educated by the Portuguese (*Short History*, p. 31). The Portuguese remained the most influential power in the area until the second half of the 17th

³ There have been several attempts to assign dates to the kings whose names are remembered in Benin. Egharevba (*A Short History of Benin*) places *Eweka I* at about A.D. 1200, Talbot (*The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*) about A.D. 1300. These dates, however, appear to be somewhat arbitrary. The first documented date is 1485 in which year the Portuguese, d'Aveiro, visited Benin City. According to Benin traditions the 15th *Oba*, *Ozolua*, was then reigning. A Portuguese document of 1518 states that "Missionaries went with the King to the war and remained a whole year." There is a Benin tradition that the war referred to was conducted by *Oba Esigie*, the son of *Ozolua*. However, none of the European chroniclers who visited Benin between the 15th and 19th centuries mention the name of the reigning *Oba* so that the dating of successive reigns is dependent very largely upon oral traditions.

⁴ See Ling Roth, 1903, pp. 4-5. Egharevba (1953, p. 28) says that it was *Esigie* who sent this ambassador.

⁵ See Ling Roth, op. cit., p. 6, and Egharevba, op. cit., pp. 29 ff.

century though English and Dutch traders had begun to visit *Ughos* and Benin City long before this. The Portuguese trading posts and missions were probably abandoned in the 1680s. There were missionaries in Benin about 1688 but they were apparently based at Warri (Churchill, vol. II, p. 676).

In 1668 Dapper gave an interesting account of Benin City which he described as having 30 straight streets about 120 feet broad with intersecting streets at right angles to them. He reported that the *Oba* of the day could bring 20,000 warriors to the field in a day and 80,000 to 100,000 if necessary. At this time Benin was exporting slaves, leopard skins, pepper, and "coral."

By 1702, however, the town had been depopulated and laid waste by a civil war (Nyandael in Bosman—see bibliography), and from this time forward written accounts of Benin describe periods of fluctuating power and prosperity disturbed by civil wars which appear to have been caused by disputes over the succession to the kingship. According to local traditions *Oba Ewuakpe* (c. 1700) decreed that the *Oba* should henceforth be succeeded by his eldest son but this did not end wars of succession for there were still disputes as to which son was, in fact, the eldest. Between periods of dissension the kingdom seems to have shown remarkable powers of recovery and in the late 18th and early 19th centuries there was renewed expansion which led to the reconquest of the Yoruba town Akure and the Ekiti country. The history of Benin, then, is one of alternating periods of territorial expansion and contraction in accordance with the degree of power and authority at the centre.

The British gradually replaced the Dutch as the main trading power in the western half of the Niger Delta. In 1888 the *Oba Ovorin* succeeded his father *Adalo*. Fearing the increasing influence of the Europeans in the Delta, he forbade all external trade. The British made several representations to the *Oba* to refrain from human sacrifices and to allow trade with Europeans and in 1892 he signed a treaty with the Deputy Commissioner and Vice-Consul of the Oil Rivers Protectorate, agreeing to accept British Protection, to refer disputes with traders and with other tribes to consular officials, to tolerate missionaries and to allow his subjects to trade freely. (See Ling Roth, Appendix I). He did not, however, adhere to this treaty and after the massacre of members of a British trade mission in 1897 British troops attacked the captured Benin City. (See Boisragon, *The Benin Massacre*, Bacon, *The City of Blood*, and Ling Roth, *Great Benin*). *Ovorin* was deported to Calabar where he remained till his death in 1914. His son was then installed as *Eweka* II and he in turn was succeeded in 1933 by his son, *Akērwa* II, the present *Oba*. The *Oba's* official sphere of authority was limited in 1914 to what had then become the Benin Division.

EXTENT OF THE BENIN EMPIRE

It is impossible at the present time to determine the extent of the Benin empire at any particular period in the past. As noted above, the frontiers were continually expanding and contracting as new conquests were made and as vassals on the borders rebelled and were reconquered. It is clear, however, that sentimental attachment to Benin and recognition of the *Oba's* temporal and spiritual authority did not necessarily depend on his ability to subdue a vassal by force of arms. Thus, for example, Lagos continued to pay tribute after it became a British Colony in 1861 (see Talbot, vol. I, p. 62) and in the reign of *Eweka* II (1914–33) chiefs in Ondo Province appealed for the *Oba's* ruling in disputes over land and succession.

On the west, Benin rule undoubtedly extended, at least from the 16th century, to Lagos, Badagry, and Wydah. According to Edo traditions Lagos itself was founded by a Benin army and *Oba Orhogbua* is said to have made it his headquarters about the middle of the 16th century (see Egharevba, *Short History*, p. 31); his son, left there to rule on his behalf, is claimed to have been the founder of the Lagos

* For further details of early trade with Benin see Ling Roth, op. cit., chap. XIII, pp. 131 ff.

ruling dynasty and this is confirmed to some extent by Lagos traditions (administrative sources). Lander, who visited Badagry in 1830, reported that the corpse of the late chief of that town had been sent to Benin and Landolphe reported that Wydah (Juda) was tributary to Benin in his day. (Landolphe, 1823, vol. II, p. 62.)

On the north-east, Akure, the Ekiti country, Owo and much of what is now Owo Division were, though intermittently, tributary to Benin; the reconquest of this area was attempted, with some success, during the early part of the 19th century. It appears from Edo traditions that Edo influence in this area dates back to the late 16th century; it is said that in the reign of *Ehègbuda* the armies of the *Oba* of Benin and the *Alafin* of Oyo planted trees at Otun in the Ekiti country to demarcate the respective spheres of influence of the two empires. (See Egharevba, op. cit., p. 34).

On the north the Usokha tribe of the Ivbiosakon group is said to have been founded by a son of the first *Oba*, *Eweka*, but the connection of the remainder of the Ivbiosakon tribes with Benin traditionally dates back to the 15th century. (See Section III of this report, pp. 85-8.) Both this and the neighbouring Etsako area (Section III, p. 101, below) remain nominally subject to the *Oba* but it is not clear to what extent his rule was ever enforced over them. (See Section III for further details.) The Ora tribe seems to have retained close associations with Benin but a military expedition was sent against the southern Ivbiosakon by the *Oba* shortly before the British conquest of 1897.

If local traditions are reliable, the expansion of the Benin empire to the north-west was at its height in the 15th and early 16th centuries. *Orzosa*, who was probably reigning at the end of the 15th century, is said to have died at Uzia (see Section II, p. 63-4 below), while fighting against the Ishan chiefdom, Uromi. His son *Esigie*, as noted above, is believed to have defeated the Idah armies in about 1515. There is some evidence that about 1840 the Uwepa-Uwano tribe, on the Niger opposite Idah, still regarded itself as tributary to Benin. (See Talbot, p. 173.) All except the extreme eastern part of the Ishan area (see Section II below) remained tributary to Benin.

To the east the Niger appears to have been the ultimate effective boundary of Benin rule though early Portuguese maps extend the frontier as far as Bonny. Onitsha on the eastern bank of the Niger has Benin titles and a ruling family which claims Benin origins and the same is true of Aboh in the extreme south; a disputed succession at the latter town is said to have been referred to the *Oba* in the first half of the 18th century (see Egharevba, op. cit., p. 46). Edo traditions appear to date the first conquests of the Ibo west of the Niger to the reign of *Ewuare* (mid-15th century). The ruling dynasties of most of the Western Ibo chiefdoms claim Benin origins and their title systems are on the Benin model. Politically they stood in much the same relation to Benin as the Ishan chiefdoms (see Section II, below); their rulers (*obis*) had to be confirmed in office by the *Oba*. Benin control over the area appears never to have been complete for long, however, and the *Oba* had continually to reassert his suzerainty.

The relations between the Kwale Ibo, Isoko, Urhobo, and some Ijaw groups to the south and Benin were complicated, but some Isoko and Urhobo tribes which had hereditary chiefs had the same kinds of connections with the *Oba* as the Ishan chiefdoms. Much of this area was unsuited to the movements of Benin armies, however. (See Section IV, below.) After its foundation the Itsekiri kingdom became to all intents and purposes independent of the *Oba* (see Itsekiri section, below).

Benin, in its turn, recognized the spiritual suzerainty of Ife. According to Egharevba the remains of every third *Oba* were taken to Ife but this custom seems to have been abandoned before the British conquest. In recent centuries the recognition of the Oni of Ife's spiritual seniority over the *Oba* appears to have had no political implications.

MAIN FEATURES OF ECONOMY

AGRICULTURE

The yam is the basis of the subsistence economy on which the villages depend and the activities associated with its cultivation determine the pattern of the agricultural year.

In January adult men who intend to make yam farms look around for promising sites, taking into account the length of time that has passed since a particular piece of land was last cultivated and the height and luxuriance of the covering vegetation. Land is rarely brought back into cultivation until it has been fallow for at least seven or eight years and the period may be as long as 15-20 years. When a plot is chosen its position is marked by crossed sticks placed by the side of an adjoining path and once a claim has been established in this way it may not be disputed. Generally speaking there is an abundance of farming land and disputes over particular sites are rare.

It is the common practice to make two farms, a large one which may be at a considerable walking distance and a smaller one closer to the village. Young men with few dependents often make only one farm, however, and older men who command a large labour supply may cultivate more than two. The size of the yam plots depends both on the available labour supply^{*} and on the quantity of seed-yams which the farmer has stored up or can afford to buy.

Clearing of the plots begins in February or early March. After the undergrowth has been cut down with machetes it is allowed to dry before being burnt. The taller trunks are then cut down—the largest may be left standing—and suitable branches are selected and stacked for later use as supports for the growing vines; the rest are burnt. This is usually completed by the end of March and is followed by the tilling of the ground. Small heaps of soil are hoed up in rows at regular intervals apart. About the same time the seed-yams, which have been stored in the houses, are split into sections suitable for planting. Planting begins in April and often continues into the early part of May. The seed yams are pressed into the sides of the holes from which the earth has been removed and the loose soil is pushed back over the top of them.

Then follows a relatively inactive period during which the yams sprout. Towards the end of May it is necessary to insert poles to support the growing vines. Further poles are planted later to support the "ropes" around which the tendrils will be coiled. Considerable time is spent in the period before the vines die off in inducing the tendrils to cling to these ropes. In the meantime the farm is weeded twice, once in July and a second time immediately before the harvest.

The Edo recognize three main varieties of yam, white, red, and "water yam" which mature in that order over a period stretching from mid-September to November and sometimes, in the case of the water yam, continuing into January.^{*} The white yam is usually quickly consumed. The main crop is the red yam which is harder and more suitable for storing. All the yams are sorted out into sizes and tied individually to vertical racks in the farm and in the houses.

Yam farming is essentially men's work though the women usually assist in weeding and planting and the whole labour supply is mobilized for the harvest. If there is a large crop the farmer may set aside some yams, usually the largest, to be sold by his wives on his behalf. The rest he divides between his wives, if he has more than one, to feed himself and his children and to sell if there is a surplus.

Corn is generally planted in rows between the yams and plantains; cocoyam, ocro, rice, groundnuts, peppers, melons, gourds, beans, and other vegetables are

^{*} The organization of labour for agriculture will be discussed below, p. 28.

^{*} The early yams are harvested much sooner in the neighbouring Ibo and Northern Edo areas and there is a considerable import from these areas in the two months before the local harvest.

distributed round the tree stumps left in the farm, along the boundaries and in other spaces. These crops are generally owned and always planted, tended, and harvested by the women, though some men give their wives seeds to plant for their own profit. From her own subsidiary crops a wife is expected to supply the needs of her husband and children, but she is free to dispose of any surplus to her own advantage.

When the yam harvest has been reaped the farm is usually replanted with corn and cassava. These and other crops, such as plantain, which may still be growing on the old farm, are gathered as they become ripe and the plot gradually reverts to fallow.

Some of the above subsidiary crops, especially plantains, corn, okro, cocoyams, and rice are also grown on separate plots by both men and women, to supplement household food supplies and for sale in the local markets. Young men who are still working on their fathers' yam farms sometimes earn a personal income in this way.

Tree Crops

The most important tree crops of long standing are the kola and the oil and coconut palms. Kola trees and coconut palms are planted, owned, and inherited by individuals. All men and some women have kola trees, which are often placed along the main paths; their fruit is essential to hospitality and an indispensable ingredient of every ritual offering. Coconut palms are generally located close to the houses and most adult men have at least one or two. Other fruit trees—orange, lemon, grapefruit, banana, avocado, etc.—are owned individually but are rare.

Oil-palms, on the other hand, are held collectively by the village community and any member of the village may reap their fruit or tap them for wine. The only exception to this rule is when a tree is growing on land under cultivation, in which case the farmer's permission is necessary for its exploitation. Close periods are declared at intervals to allow the trees to recuperate and these are usually followed by a general assault on the fruit. Otherwise the Edo engage only desultorily in the palm-produce industry (except where they own large plantations) which is mainly in the hands of immigrants, especially Urhobo, Isoko, and Kwale Ibo. Most households find it necessary to buy palm-oil to eke out what they produce themselves.

Cash Crops

The main sources of monetary income to-day are rubber and cocoa, which are grown on small-holdings as well as in plantations, palm products from plantations, and timber.

Most Edo householders own a few hundred rubber trees which are tapped each morning by adolescent boys and young men and even by women when the market price is high. The rubber is smoked in ovens and made into sheets in presses which are owned individually by one or two persons in each village to whom the rest pay small fees for their use. Cocoa is less universal though most adult men have one or more plots. Often, however, little attention is paid to it and the yield is not high.

Extensive plantations of rubber, cocoa, coconuts, oil-palms, and, in one case, coffee, are owned by individuals—mainly wealthy and titled men in Benin City—who employ paid labour. A considerable proportion of the labour force is of Ibo origin.

The commercial extraction of timber, for which much capital and a highly organized labour force is required, is mainly in the hands of European firms and a few local individual and family concerns, though associations are sometimes formed for the purpose of cutting, sawing, and selling timber locally. There is one African-owned sawmill in Benin City and a certain amount of the timber production is used

locally for building purposes, but the great bulk is exported to Europe and America from the Sapele River ports to which it is transported by river and on lorries.

HUNTING, GATHERING, AND FISHING

The hunting of bush-pig, various kinds of buck, and other small animals is universal. All men set traps on their farms and in the bush for the protection of their crops and to supplement the food supply. Most have guns, many of which are of local manufacture. In the denser forest areas there are part-time specialist hunters who employ dogs and guns. Elephant hunters too are specialists and the *Oba* formerly had his own band of elephant hunters located at *Oregbeni*, a village just outside Benin City. Another group, in the capital, had the duty of catching and keeping leopards for sacrifice, and a third group was responsible for providing fish-eagles for the same purpose.⁹

The collection of wild bush products, and of the snails and tortoises which form an important part of the protein diet, is in the hands of women. They and the children are responsible for supplying the household with wood and water though a man will often carry home a log he finds lying about.

The Edo play little part in the exploitation of the rivers, depending largely upon the *Urhobo*, *Ijaw*, and *Itsekiri* for their fish. Formerly, however, certain villages were responsible for providing the *Oba's* court with fish, a service which was organized by *Ogwa*, one of the minor title-holders in Benin City.

LIVESTOCK

Goats, sheep, dogs, and fowls are ubiquitous and are all important as sacrificial offerings as well as for meat; they are indeed rarely killed except for sacrificial purposes.

In some villages there are a few dwarf cattle which graze on grassy patches round the settlements. For the most part they are owned by the *Oba* and other chiefs and wealthy men in Benin City. Arrangements are made with the villagers, who look after them and receive a proportion of the increase. Similar arrangements are made in respect of goats and sheep by commoners. Cows are killed only as sacrificial offerings during important rites. The members of certain ward-guilds in Benin City and elsewhere were responsible for the care of the *Oba's* leopards, horses, cows, dogs, and sheep.¹⁰

MARKETS AND TRADE

Most villages have markets which belong exclusively to them or are shared with one or more neighbouring villages. There are, in addition, a number of large feeder-markets which supply the capital and other large towns outside the kingdom with foodstuffs. Benin City itself has two large markets. All markets are held every four days so that in the capital there is a market every alternate day. Women handle all kinds of foodstuffs and other native products while both sexes engage in the modern trade in imported goods. Cash crops are sold by middle-men or women or by the producers themselves to European and native exporters.

Before European rule, trade with visiting ships at the port of *Ughos* (*Gwatto* or *Ughoton*) was closely controlled by the state. The *Oba* had a monopoly of the export of slaves, ivory, palm-kernels, and pepper. Special officials led by the *Unwagwe* and *Eribo*, the senior chiefs of the *Iwebo* palace association (see p. 37), visited the ships on his behalf and not until his business was complete were other chiefs and commoners allowed to trade on their own behalf, and then only with the *Oba's* permission.

⁹ See "The internal organization of Benin City," pp. 34-5 below.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

CRAFTS AND INDUSTRIES

Most of the important indigenous crafts of the Benin kingdom were in the hands of special ward-guilds in Benin City. There were guilds of blacksmiths and brass-smiths, wood and ivory carvers (one group), leather workers, weavers of special embroidered cloths, drum-makers, locksmiths, etc., and some of these still function.

Brass-casting was confined to the *Iguerēvū* ward of Benin City whose members mostly claim descent from *Iguoghāe* who is said to have introduced the craft from Ife in the time of *Oba Oghē*. There has been much speculation as to where the Edo learnt this art and while it is now generally accepted that Ife is the immediate source its ultimate origin is still in question. A detailed bibliography of the subject is given on p. 168. Almost the whole production of the brass-smiths was at the command of the palace and it consisted very largely of ritual and ceremonial objects (see p. 35 below).

Wood-carving and ivory carving, too, are almost non-existent outside the capital, where they are the concern of the *Igbesāwā* ward and of certain functionaries within the palace. The carved staves (*uxurhe*) which are the symbols of the deities worshipped by village communities (see p. 56) are produced in the *Igbesāwā* ward on the instructions of the *Oba*. Important title-holders in the capital and hereditary village chiefs could, however, apparently obtain *uxurhe* and wooden heads as altar decorations and other ritual and ceremonial objects directly. The *Oba* had control over all ivory in the kingdom and nearly all ivory carvings appear to have been for his personal use.

Carpenters (*onwina*) who produced mortars, door-frames, roofing beams, drum-parts, etc., for the *Oba*'s court formed a special group located in a number of scattered villages outside Benin City. They were under the control of a title-holder in the capital who, when their services were required, summoned them and sent them to any village where suitable timber was available. The inhabitants of that village were responsible for feeding and lodging them while they carried out their work.

The *Onwina N'ido* ward of Benin City produce a special kind of cloth worn by the *Oba* and, in the form of pennants tied at the waist, by important title-holders. This cloth is woven on large frames, both at the palace and in the ward, and is embroidered with patterns representing the *Oba* and certain ritual symbols.

In the past it is probable that the *Igū* ward of Benin City had a monopoly of iron-smithing but at the present day smiths from that ward and from Awka (Ibo) and Ineme (Northern Edo—see pp. 123-6 below) are to be found in most villages.

Pottery¹¹ for both ceremonial and utilitarian purposes was formerly produced by only two villages, Use to the west of Benin City and Utekon to the north. At the present day pots are being produced in the brass-smiths' ward and some other parts of the capital. Potters' clay is obtained from a village near the *Ovia* River.

Apart from the ceremonial cloth mentioned above there is very little weaving in the central area of the kingdom. In the north and east women weave rough cloths on upright looms. Mats and baskets are made in a number of villages but the greater part of the supply is to-day imported from outside the area.

¹¹ See Thomas, 1910 (3).

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND POLITICAL SYSTEM

KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY.

The basic kinship terms used in reference are as follows (with first person possessive pronoun):—

<i>erha vĕ</i>	my father
<i>iye vĕ</i>	my mother
<i>ovi vĕ</i> (pl. <i>ivi</i>)	my child
<i>ovi-erha vĕ</i>	my sibling (same F.)
<i>ovi-iye vĕ</i>	my sibling (same M.)
<i>erha v-odede</i> or <i>erha vĕ noxwa</i> (big)	my grandfather
<i>iye v-odede</i> or <i>iye vĕ noxwa</i>	my grandmother
<i>ovoxa vĕ</i>	my wife
<i>odafĕ vĕ</i> or <i>odo vĕ</i>	my husband
<i>otĕ vĕ</i>	my sibling and consanguineal relative
<i>oruaĕ vĕ</i>	my relative-in-law

The term *otĕ* is used, in the first place, to denote sibling, but is extended to collateral kin, usually but not necessarily of one's own generation, on both the maternal and paternal sides. Where more specific reference is required, combinations of the basic terms are employed. Thus, a half-sibling is *ovi erha* (father's child) or *oviye* (mother's child). The latter term usually denotes full siblingship but if further confirmation is necessary *ovi-erha-oviye* may be used. To distinguish between paternal and maternal grandparents the terms *erh-erha* and *iy-erha* (father's father and mother) and *erh-iye* and *iy-iye* (mother's father and mother) are used. A father's sibling is *ovi-erh-erha* (child of the father's father) or *ovi-iy-erha* (child of the mother's father), and a mother's sibling *ovi-erh-iye* or *ovi-iy-iye*. This method may be extended to any category of consanguineal relatives but, since it quickly becomes a clumsy mode of reference, circumlocutions are usually employed. There are no special terms for mother's brother or father's sister. Precise relationships with affines may be denoted by combinations of the words for husband and wife with those for father, mother, and child. Where the sex is not clear, the terms *okpia* (male) and *oxwo* (female) are affixed, coming after the personal pronoun.

The term *ovoxa* (which also means "servant" or "dependent") is used only with pronouns; otherwise the word for wife is *avĕ*. *Odafĕ* is used only with pronouns while *odo* is of general application.

The terms *isw*, *eye*, *ihizhiĕ*, *sakparĕ-ghodi*, and *ghabiona* denote descendants from the first to the fifth generation; they are, however, rarely used to refer to individuals.

In address the terms *iye* and *evava* or *ebaba* (father) are used for all relatives of ascending generations, while the very old are addressed respectfully as *odede* (old person). Kin of the same generation address each other as *otĕ*, *ovi-erha*, and/or *oviye*, while *ovi* is used for those of a descending generation. No limits are set to the use of these terms and all may be applied affectionately to non-kin. A man may refer to or address his son's or brother's wife as "my wife." Equals and junior relatives of all categories may be addressed by their personal names. Where there is an element of doubt teknonymy is frequently employed.

DOMESTIC AND FAMILY GROUPINGS

In the villages outside Benin City households vary in size from a single (usually impotent) man to a joint family of some 20 souls. The following types of family can be recognized:—

1. The nuclear or compound family consisting of a man and his wife or wives

and their children, who may occupy a house or be located in rooms in the house of the man's father or senior brother.

2. The joint family consisting of an elderly man with his wives and unmarried children, together with one or more unmarried sons with their wives and children and, in some cases, younger married brothers. Most married men prefer to move out of their father's house before or soon after the latter's death. Recently married sons may, however, stay under the authority of their senior brother (who inherits the house) for a time, especially if they have no children, and unmarried sons will stay there until they are married and have children.

3. The extended family, occupying several, usually neighbouring houses, made up of a man and his married brothers and sons with their wives and children, and, possibly, the sons and unmarried daughters of his deceased elder brother(s) with the latter's wives and children.

To any of these groupings may be added divorced and widowed mothers, sisters, and daughters of the male (and sometimes the female) members together with other categories of kin, servants and, formerly, slaves.

Residence, after marriage, is virilocal. A man brings his first wife to live in his father's house and remains there until the birth of one or more children. An only son may remain with his father until the latter's death, when he inherits the house. If, on account of witchcraft, quarrelling, or for some other reason a man should wish to move out of his own village he will generally go to one where he has paternal or maternal relatives or even friends but very rarely to his wife's village,¹² where he will stand in a servant relationship towards his parents-in-law without the benefit of the backing of his own kin.

None of the types of family listed above necessarily corresponds to an economic unit, for either production or consumption. An only son who remains in his father's house may continue to farm jointly with his father during the latter's lifetime. On the other hand when a man has a number of sons, the senior ones may begin to farm on their own even while living in the same house as their father. A son who does this may farm a piece of land adjoining that of his father and continue to assist the latter or he and a brother, relative, affine, or friend may assist each other in cultivating adjoining but separate tracts. Alternatively he may clear and work his land quite independently.¹³ In order to farm satisfactorily a man requires the assistance of one or more women, for it is they who plant and care for subsidiary crops. The unmarried son of a widow or a divorced woman who chooses to remain with his mother may co-operate with her in farming a piece of land. Similarly a widow or divorcee may enter into an arrangement with her brother for this purpose. The most common farming unit, however, consists of a man and his wife or wives and any children who are old enough to assist. If a man has two or more women dependent upon him (two or more wives, a wife or wives and a mother or sister, etc.) he divides his farm into sections on which each will plant her own subsidiary crops independently. The units of consumption and production correspond to each other.

The following economic arrangements were observed in a typical large joint family. The headman was assisted in his farm by his two wives, two unmarried sons, and the widowed daughter of a deceased daughter. A married son living with him farmed separately with his two wives (their three children being too young to help). A third unit was formed by the son of one of the headman's wives by a

¹² The kin of husband and wife may live in the same village in which case this does not apply.

¹³ In the Benin kingdom there is no permanent ownership of tracts of farm land by either individuals or kin groups. The land is owned jointly by the whole village (in some cases there is no boundary between villages) and any man may farm anywhere on village land subject to the approval of the chief and elders. Thus a young man is not dependent upon his father or senior brother or any other relative for obtaining land to cultivate.

former husband and his mother (who thus had sections of two farms), and a fourth by a widowed daughter of the headman and her unmarried son and daughter. Another married son lived independently in Benin as a rubber buyer and two others (unmarried) worked there as carpenters.

This joint family formed part of an extended family, under the same headman, which included two other adjacent households. The first consisted of the headman's junior brother and his wife, an adult son and his wife and a number of younger children; the second of the headman's senior son and his wife and unmarried children. Thus the extended family comprised six producing and consuming units (excluding the absent members) four of which occupied one household and the other two separate households.

Each of the types of family listed above is a quasi-political unit in that its members are under the immediate control, for certain purposes, of the oldest male who can apply sanctions against them. The three kinds of family form a hierarchy in so far as the head of the nuclear or compound family may be under the authority of the head of a joint family who may in turn be subject to the head of his extended family. This situation is realized in the extended family described above where the junior brother of the headman is the head of a joint family which includes the nuclear family headed by his own son. The headmen of the various kinds of families settle disputes between their dependents and punish them for misdemeanours. The headmen of joint and extended families, as members of the senior age-grade with an effective voice in the village council (see below), represent their dependents *vis-à-vis* the village community and can be held responsible for their behaviour.

A family head has the right to apply physical sanctions against those under his authority though he would not attempt to beat his adult sons or brothers. The main support for such authority, however, lies in the relation between the living and the deceased patrilineal ancestors of the family head. The situation is complicated by the rule of primogeniture. When a man dies his senior son sets up an altar at which to communicate with him or, if his father was himself a senior son, takes over the altar at which the latter worshipped his ancestors. The welfare of the senior son and his siblings and the wives and agnatic descendants of himself and his brothers is believed to depend upon the goodwill of the deceased father and his lineal ancestors, who punish wrongdoing with sickness, death, and other catastrophes. As the intermediary with these ancestors the senior son thus has access to powerful supernatural sanctions. His authority is not complete, however, so long as any of his dead father's junior brothers survive for, since they themselves, as junior sons, do not have ancestor shrines, they must be represented at his. The senior among them thus occupies the role of a second priest and headman; the actual balance of power between the two depends upon their relative ages and personalities, and their economic and political statuses.

The rights and obligations consequent upon common membership of domestic and family groupings are conceived of in terms of a master-servant relationship. In relation to the family head or the household head all his dependants are servants. The term *voxa* which means, in the first instance, "wife" may be applied to any member, male or female, of this group in emphasizing his or her dependence upon the headman. Its effective plural *ibekka* also carries an overtone of subservience and covers all those, kin or non-kin, under the authority of a family head. Children are thought of as the servants of their father, wives of their husbands, junior brothers of their seniors, and younger of older women. Thus in each household or family there is a series of hierarchies which determines the moral rights and obligations of the members towards each other.

At the present day family groupings in Benin City do not differ markedly from those in the villages. In the past, however, the households of important title-holders were considerably larger. The chiefs themselves had more wives and children and to these were added slaves and servants, the latter frequently given by their own

parents in return for the patronage of the title-holder. It is probable, too, that married men stayed in their fathers' and senior brothers' compounds for much longer periods and were subject to a stricter and more effective discipline than now exists. Thus the households of high-ranking and wealthy chiefs probably contained several hundred people, though many of these would live and be employed from time to time on their masters' farms in the villages. To-day few households have more than 30 inhabitants.

AGNATES AND OTHER KIN

It will be clear from what has been said above that the rule of descent is patrilineal. Children are affiliated to the lineage of their pater (that is, the person to whom their mother is married or betrothed) from whom they inherit and to whose title, if any, the eldest surviving son succeeds. An exception to this rule is found in some cases where the holder of a title has daughters but no sons. By arrangement with the senior daughter's husband, one of her sons may be adopted by her father and made his heir and successor. This is not, however, universal, for in many instances the title passes, in the absence of sons, to a brother or more remote agnate of the deceased holder. It is, however, a common practice for sons-in-law who have a number of sons to send one of them to their wife's father to be brought up by him and to act as his servant but this does not usually affect his affiliation to his father's lineage.

The widest effective patrilineage is usually that which corresponds to the extended family and is thus, as will be seen from the above, only two or three generations in depth. Beyond this level precise relationships may be traced for several generations but the degree of corporateness of lineages of greater depth and span depends largely upon political factors, that is, upon the prestige and material advantages of belonging to the lineage of a hereditary village chief or of a title-holder in Benin City. Such advantages depended in the past upon the efficacy of the patronage of the title-holder and at the present day they have largely disappeared. There remains only the prestige of belonging to a lineage which possesses a hereditary title (to which, unless the direct line fails, only the holder's sons can aspire) or to one whose members have held important non-hereditary titles.

The poor development of the lineage system in marked contrast with that of, for example, the neighbouring Yoruba, appears to be correlated with a number of economic and political factors:—

1. A system of land tenure in which kin groups do not lay claim to tracts of land. Each adult male is dependent upon the village community as a whole, rather than upon his own kin group, for land on which to farm or build. (See p. 44 below.)

2. The unitary character of the village community in general, which is expressed in the three-tier age-grade system that cuts across kin groups and makes age, rather than lineage affiliation, the criterion of authority. The unity of the village is illustrated by the fact that a man who wishes to build a house calls upon the village as a whole rather than his own kinsmen to assist him. (See p. 31 ff.)

3. Low marriage-payments. In order to obtain his first wife a man is dependent only upon his father and possibly his paternal grandfather, while the acquiring of subsequent wives is his own responsibility. Similarly the marriage-payments are distributed among an equally restricted circle of the bride's kin.

4. The rule of primogeniture by which a senior son inherits his father's house and most of his property and, where applicable, his title; thus the benefits of inheritance are restricted within the narrowest limits. In accordance with this principle the system of ancestor worship is such that there is a tendency for a new set of shrines to be set up in each generation so that there is a constant hiving-off of ancestor-worshipping units, i.e., of ritually and "politically" effective corporate lineages.

5. A title-system in which titles are either hereditary by primogeniture or are not hereditary in any sense. This is in marked contrast with the Yoruba situation where most titles are associated with lineages and may be aspired to by any male member.

Agnation, then, determines the line of inheritance and succession, membership of wider domestic and family groupings, of a village community and (see pp. 37-9 ff.) nominally, at least, of one of the palace associations. In Benin City, and a few villages outside, it determines membership of ward-guilds which carry out certain crafts and hold ceremonial and ritual offices. Finally it determines membership of the dispersed clans or quasi-clans to one of which every Edo belongs. There are about 35 of these each with its own morning salutation and taboos. With few exceptions each clan is nominally headed by a hereditary village chief or hereditary title-holder in Benin City. In the past they had a political aspect in so far as slaves and servants as well as descendants of members and their wives took on the salutation and taboos of their masters. One of the "clans" is headed by the *Iyase* whose title is non-hereditary and, therefore, can be acquired by a member of any clan who, thereupon, with his followers, takes on the appropriate salutation and taboos. The clan greeting is addressed by inferiors to their superiors on first meeting them in the morning. The *Oba's* clan is further distinguished by the semi-circular shape of its members' ancestor altars.

Non-agnatic kinship does not give rise to corporate groups or to membership of any social groupings. Strong ties of affection exist between a person and his or her maternal kin. It is to them that a man naturally turns for help in any undertaking should his agnates fail him, and if he decides to leave his father's village he is most likely to seek a home in that of his mother. Within the compound family stronger ties usually exist between full siblings than between those who have different mothers—a fact which is explicitly recognized in certain Edo proverbs; full brothers are more likely to assist each other in farming and other enterprises and they inherit their father's property as a unit (see p. 46 below).

Affinal relations are discussed in the section on marriage (see p. 48).

VILLAGE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The village is the basic political unit of the Benin kingdom. Generally speaking—though there are exceptions to all these generalizations—it is the widest unit for age-grade organization, the minimal land-holding unit, the smallest group which can have a hereditary chief, the smallest tribute unit, and also the co-operative unit for house building; most villages unite in worship of a common deity (see p. 56).

Each village is a compact settlement though most are divided into wards (*idibũ*) which may be separated from each other by small patches of bush. There are two kinds of village plan. In the first type each ward consists of a cluster of houses round a central open space or short street; in the other all the houses in the village are arranged along one or both sides of a single street. Both types appear to be traditional but the second has become predominant with the movement of villages to the main roads in recent years.

Each ward consists of one or more extended families living in close proximity and recognizing the authority of the oldest man or, in exceptional cases, of a hereditary chief. Wards consisting of a single extended family are typical and the ward *per se* is not usually an exogamous unit. In large villages the wards take on some or all of the features listed above as typical of the village and the line between the concept of village and ward becomes difficult to draw in functional terms. In small villages, on the other hand, the ward organization tends to be submerged in the life of the village community as a whole and there is little corporate activity at the ward level. Order of precedence between wards is recognized on the basis of antiquity and other factors.

Age-grade Organization

In the Benin villages the male population¹⁴ at any given time is horizontally stratified into three age-grades, viz.:—

✓ 1. *Iroghae*—entered by boys in their early teens, that is, as soon as they are considered strong enough to take part in the communal tasks of the grade. These include the clearing of paths to farms, streams, and other villages and the care and repair of shrines and other public buildings. Most men stay in this grade for from 15 to 20 years.

2. *Ighele*¹⁵—the grade of adult men who perform the heavier and more skilled communal tasks. They were formerly the executive arm of political and judicial authority within the village and the potential fighting force.

3. *Edi* (sing. *edi*)—the elders who are exempt from communal labour and who form the village council for political and judicial purposes. (In other contexts the term *edi* refers to the collective dead of a village or other corporate group).¹⁶

There are no formal age-sets and no fixed intervals for entry and promotion which are effected as they become expedient. Men are usually promoted in groups whose members develop an *esprit de corps* which is demonstrated in mutual affection and assistance. Individual promotions may be made, however, as, for instance, when a man has been absent from his village at the time when he would normally have been elevated to the next grade.

Ideally, seniority and order of promotion are strictly according to age but other factors may intervene to upset this, especially the custom prevailing in some villages of inviting an adult senior son to become *edi* on the death of his father. In certain circumstances the status of *edi* can be honorarily conferred on young boys. Thus, in one village people may apply to have their children made *edi* during the burial of an *edi* or the installation of an *onogie* (hereditary chief) or *ediwere* (see below). Honorary *edi* status does not, however, exempt the child from taking his place with the lower grades when he grows up; it merely reduces the expenses involved in promotion to the *edi* grade proper. A man who is made a member of the *edi* or *ada* grade of one of the palace associations (see below, p. 37) automatically becomes *edi* in his own village.

The two lower grades each have two leaders or *ikao* (sing. *okao*)—*ikairoghae* and *ikaighele*. They are chosen on the basis of seniority, qualities of leadership, and ward precedence. Their task is to direct the communal activities of their grades and to act as the intermediary between the grades and the *ediwere* and, where present, the *onogie*. They discipline their fellows with the permission of the *ediwere*.

The *ediwere*, subject to certain qualifications (ward precedence, sanity, being a native of the village, etc.) is the oldest man in the village, or, in some cases, the first of the surviving elders to have been made *edi*. Where there is no hereditary chief he is the sole village headman. In any case he controls age-grade activities and as the priest of the collective ancestor spirits (*edi*) and of the earth (*oto*) he commands powerful supernatural sanctions; he is the repository of village traditions and the recognized authority on customary law.

The oldest man in each ward is regarded as the *ediwere* of the ward. Where the ward has a separate *edi* shrine he is its custodian and he directs age-grade activities within the ward.

In some villages the first four *edi* (*ediñene*) or the first seven (*ediñihir*) are accorded a special status.

Age-grade promotion ceremonies are described elsewhere (see p. 49 below).

¹⁴ There are no age-grades for women.

¹⁵ At the present day there is a tendency, in some villages, for this grade to disappear. Individuals and groups then pass directly from *iroghae* to *edi*.

¹⁶ See p. 56.

Authority in the Village

There are two kinds of village headman, hereditary and non-hereditary. The non-hereditary headman (*adiwere*) is found in all villages and age is the principle factor in his appointment (see above).

Not all villages have an hereditary headman or *onogie* (pl. *enigie*) and, on the other hand, the holder of such an office may rule over a number of villages which thus constitute a chiefdom; conversely a ward within a village may have its own *onogie*. The office ideally passes from eldest son to eldest son like all other hereditary offices in the Benin kingdom. Some *enigie* claim descent from chiefs who ruled before the founding of the present Benin dynasty or before the village or chiefdom in question was incorporated in the Benin state. Others are descended from followers of previous kings who were appointed in recognition of their services. The majority, however, trace their descent to junior sons of past *Oba* who were made *enigie* on the accession of their senior brother—a practice which still persists. In some other cases the hereditary chief is the priest (*ohi*) of a deity worshipped by the village community on behalf of the state.¹⁷

The heir to a hereditary headmanship must validate his succession by organizing and playing a major part in the mortuary rites of his deceased father. If he is still a minor when his father dies some other member of his father's lineage is chosen to act for him as *edayi* (*dayi* = to uphold, support). Failing a male heir the succession may pass to a brother or more remote agnate of the deceased though in some villages it is the custom for the son of the latter's senior daughter to succeed (see p. 30). Disputed succession is decided by the *Oba* of Benin.

In villages without *enigie* meetings of the village council take place either at the house of the *adiwere* or in a special meeting-house, *agwedii*, which contains the shrine of the collective dead (*adi*) of the village (see p. 56). Every village has an *agwedii* located in a cleared space at the entrance to or in the middle of the village.

In villages with a hereditary headman meetings are convened at his house. In such cases there is, in effect, a dual headmanship and the pattern of authority which emerges varies considerably, depending upon the relative following, influence and personality of the two incumbents. In so far as there is any consistent division of functions the *adiwere* concerns himself with age-grade organisation and the internal affairs of the village while the *onogie* is the community's representative *vis-à-vis* other villages and the central authority of the kingdom. Where he is the ruler of a petty chiefdom he co-ordinates the activities of its component villages. In practice, however, the powers of the two headmen tend to overlap; a strong *onogie* gives orders to the lower age-grades while a weak one may submit his disputes with commoners to the decisions of the *adiwere*. The wealthier and more powerful *enigie* live in houses similar in plan, size, and decoration to those of important title-holders in Benin City. They confer titles on their followers and formerly received tribute and other services from them. On the other hand, the households of the less influential *enigie* are indistinguishable from those of their subjects.

The village council is made up of the *onogie* (where present), the *adiwere* and the members of the *adi* age-grade. Where a particular joint or extended family has no *adi* a younger man may be invited to sit on the council. Meetings are held in public and non-members, male and female, may be asked to give their opinions though they do not usually initiate discussion except in presenting matters which concern them personally. Apart from its judicial functions the council discusses such topics as the collection of tribute (formerly), or, nowadays, of tax; the organization of collective tasks and of cult festivals; the performance of sacrifices for the good of the community and the delegation of representatives to consult diviners on behalf of the community or individuals within it; relations with and instructions from the central authority; contributions to funds both for public purposes and to assist mem-

¹⁷ See *Hero-deities*, p. 56, below.

bers of the village who are in difficulties; and, at the present day, the building and upkeep of schools, etc. After a free discussion the *adiwere* or the *onogie* announces the council's decision and gives orders for its implementation.

Executive functions are performed by the lower age-grades under their leaders and supervised by the *adi*. In so far as the women are concerned the older ones in the village or from each ward are summoned and informed of what is expected of them.

CHIEFDOMS AND VILLAGE-GROUPS

Petty chiefdoms consisting of two or more villages owing allegiance to a hereditary chief are found in most parts of the kingdom but are most characteristic of its eastern region. In the centre, north, and west there is a tendency for villages to be independent of each other and to deal as separate units with the central authority in Benin City. East of the Orhio River the local groupings are very similar to those of the Ishan chiefdoms.¹⁸ Villages, some of which themselves have hereditary chiefs, are grouped into chiefdoms each under an *onogie* who is responsible for the group to the central authority in Benin. He formerly organized the collection of tribute and the provision of labour for the *Oba*. He settles disputes between members of the different villages under his control, calls meetings of delegates from all the villages to discuss matters concerning the group as a whole and stations titleholders (*exarof*) in all the villages.

Village-groups without hereditary chiefs are found in some parts of the kingdom. Joint meetings of the councils of such groups are presided over by the senior *adiwere*, chosen according to age or in conformity with the precedence of certain villages over others. The villages of such groups commonly had, in the past, arrangements for peaceably settling disputes between their respective members.

Ties of friendship and mutual co-operation in limited respects obtain between other groups of villages on the basis of such factors as the alleged common descent of their founders, joint exploitation of farming and hunting territory, common markets, and common possession of the same cult. In the past the central authority of the kingdom created certain groups for the purpose of tribute collection.

At the present day there is a tendency for hereditary chiefs to lose their authority in villages which were tributary to them, and for each village to become an autonomous unit within the kingdom.

THE INTERNAL ORGANIZATION OF BENIN CITY

Benin City is divided into two halves by a broad street. In one half (*Ogbe*) live the *Oba* and his court and the palace chiefs and in the other (*Ore n'axwa*) the town chiefs.

The two halves are further sub-divided into more than 40 wards the members of each of which have special duties to perform "for the *Oba*." They include craft specialists such as blacksmiths and brass-smiths, leather workers, wood and ivory carvers, tapestry weavers, drum-makers, hunters, leopard-keepers, cow-herds, and builders; many different groups of priests, "doctors," diviners, ordeal administrators; minstrels and other ceremonial functionaries; and other palace officials such as store-keepers and harem-attendants.

Within each ward the male population is stratified in grades roughly parallel to those in the villages but with differences in the details of organization and in the names given to the grades. Qualification for the higher grades may take into account proficiency in the special skills of the group.

Leadership within the ward is ascribed on a variety of principles. Some have *adiwere* chosen in the same way as those in the villages, others are headed by heredi-

¹⁸ See Section II of this Survey, pp. 61-80.

tary or non-hereditary title-holders or by leaders (*ikao*) appointed by or with the approval of the *Oba*.

Each ward-guild is affiliated to one of the palace associations through whose leaders it makes contacts with the *Oba* and receives orders from him; the leaders of some of the more important wards, however, have the right of direct access to the *Oba*.

The bronzes for which Benin has become famous are produced by the brass-smiths' guild *Iguerhe* which is headed by a number of hereditary chiefs of whom the senior is entitled *Ine*. Bronzes were produced and distributed only on the orders of the *Oba* and any other person wishing to obtain a casting would have to apply through him. The production of bronzes for the decoration of the altar of a deceased *Oba* was a ritual affair which formed part of the installation ceremonies of his successor. Heads and other figures were cast on a special piece of ground used for no other purpose, the new *Oba* himself pouring the first crucible of molten bronze and other senior chiefs following him. The *Oba* rewarded the smiths with slaves, money, and other gifts.

Where the earnings of a guild were insufficient its members had farms in the villages, worked by their dependents and slaves.

THE CENTRAL STATE ORGANIZATION

The most important political and ceremonial offices in the Benin kingdom are linked with chiefly titles (*egie*) of which there are a very large number, organized into a complex system of grades and ranks.

Uzama and Eghaevo

Three orders of chiefs stand out from the rest in terms of rank and degree of authority. They are:—

1. The *Uzama n'Ihir*—the Seven *Uzama*—whose titles, in order of rank, are *Oliha*, *Edohi*, *Ezomo*, *Ero*, *Eholo n'Ire*, *Olot*, and *Edaikh*. The *Uzama* are the most ancient and highest ranking order of chiefs in the state, though for a long period prior to British rule they had as a body probably been less influential than the *Eghaevo* (see below).

The first five titles are generally ascribed to the period preceding the present dynasty; it was their holders who sent to the *Owi* of Ife for a king. The first *Olot* was a "brother" of *Araminya* who accompanied him from Ife and stayed in Benin to help look after the interests of the young *Eweka* (see p. 20, above) who later attached him to the *Uzama*. The seventh title, *Edaikh*, is held by the senior son of the reigning *Oba*. *Ewuare*, the 12th *Oba*, is believed to have been the first to confer this title on his son and make him an *Uzama*.

All seven titles are hereditary; the first six descend on the death of the holder to his eldest surviving son who must, however, be ceremonially installed at the *Oba*'s palace. The *Edaikh* title becomes vacant when the holder is installed as *Oba* and remains so until his senior son is considered mature enough to take his place.

All the *Uzama* have their own settlements outside the inner wall on the western side of Benin City. Of these Uzebu, Urubi, and Usele, belonging to the *Ezomo*, *Ero*, and *Edaikh*, respectively, are considerable villages, Idumwoloton (*Iduwolot*) is a ward of Benin City, while Idumwoliha (*Iduwoliha*), Idumwedoben (*Iduwedoben*), and Idumwehelo (*Iduwehelo*) consist of little more than the immediate dependents of the chief. Each *Uzama* enjoys a large degree of independence in his own village. He keeps a court with palace associations organized on similar lines to those of the *Oba* (see below), though on a smaller scale, and he can confer titles on his own subjects. This does not apply to *Olot*, however; titles at Idumwoloton are conferred by the *Oba* at the time of his installation. There and at Uzebu, Urubi, and Usele, some titles are still held but the palace societies have ceased to function.

Apart from their political functions (see below), the chief duty of the *Uzama* as a body is the installation of a new *Oba*.¹⁹ The *Edaikē* is pronounced *Oba* by the *Oliha*. *Obi* is in charge of the site at *Usama* where the installation takes place and of the arrangements for the ceremony. The seniority of the *Uzama* over other chiefly groups is recognized in the position which they take up at this and other state ceremonies.

Other functions of individual *Uzama* are as follows. The *Ezomo* was the senior warrior chief who waged all major campaigns on the *Oba*'s behalf. In the past he was undoubtedly the wealthiest and most influential of the *Uzama*. Like the *Oba* he is referred to as *Imo* (child). His wives are known as *ilo* and, like the *Oba*'s wives, are subject to strict limitations in their contacts with other men; he alone, apart from the *Oba*, is allowed to wear a coronet of coral beads. *Ero* was the guardian of the north-western gateway to Benin City and had some responsibility for the *Edaikē* and the Queen-mother, near whose court his own village is situated. *Obi* is the keeper of the shrine of *Azama* at which special sacrifices take place at the naming of the *Oba*'s eldest son and on other occasions. He and the *Edaikē*, as the junior members, convey messages and share out any benefits which accrue to the group.

The *Uzama* meet together at *Oliha*'s compound where the shrine of their collective ancestors (*edi-Uzama*) is located. The *Oba* and the *Uzama* make special sacrifices there on their accession, *Oliha* being the chief priest.

Two other hereditary titles are sometimes associated with the *Uzama*, though their holders are not generally recognized as members of the group. *Elema*, who claims an origin similar to that of *Obi*, has a village outside the south-western gate of the city. *Ogiavē* is the descendant of the ruler of the land on which the *Oba*'s palace now stands before *Araminya* came from *Ife*. On his accession each *Oba* fights a mock battle with *Ogiavē* for possession of the land (see p. 20).

2. The *Eghaevo n'Ore* are the "town chiefs" as distinct from the "palace chiefs" (*Eghaevo n'Ogbe*). Benin City is divided into two parts separated by a broad street. The smaller south-western part which contains the *Oba*'s compound (*eguae-oba*) is called *Ogbe*, the rest *Ore n'oxwa* (literally "the big town").

There are 19 *Eghaevo n'Ore* titles, of which the most important, in order of seniority, are *Iyase*, *Esgbā*, *Es3*, and *Osuna*, sometimes known as *ekadal'ens edo*, "the four pillars of Benin."

Oba Ewuare is said to be the founder of the order, which at first consisted of the four titles named above, though an *Iyase* is named in the reign of his father, *Obē*. Later *Oba* added more titles and with one exception they all rank in order of their antiquity.

Before British rule only one town title—*Ologbose*—was hereditary. The remaining titles were theoretically open to free competition. Qualifications for and manner of appointment to these titles and their position in the political organization will be described below. There are now two more hereditary titles, *Osula* and *Obareyido*; the latter created by the present *Oba* is included in both the "town" and "palace" orders, though held by one man.

The *Iyase*, who together with the *Ezomo* (see above) was one of the two senior warrior chiefs, is the leader and spokesman of the *Eghaevo n'Ore*. *Ologbose*, who was second-in-command to the *Ezomo*, and *Imarā* are the other war captains. The *Esgba* is known as *adiwere edo* and is the priest of the Edo people to whom sacrifices are made by the *Eghaevo* in times of national catastrophe. He is also the *Iyase*'s deputy in the latter's absence.

It is the *Eghaevo n'Ore* who, on behalf of and in the presence of the *Oba*, confers

¹⁹ The *Uzama* resemble in some respects the groups of chiefs known as "kingmakers" among the Yoruba but, unlike the latter, they do not elect the *Oba*, succession being by primogeniture.

titles on all chiefs other than the *Oba* himself. The *Iyase* or the senior *Eghaevo n'Ore* present makes the actual pronouncement.

Town chiefs should not live in *Ogbe*. If resident there when the title is bestowed upon them, they should remove to *Ore n'axwa*.

For some purposes the *Iyoba*, who is the actual mother of the reigning *Oba*, is ranked fifth among the town chiefs; she has her own court at the village *Uselu*, just outside Benin City, where the *Edaiki* also resides.

3. The *Eghaevo n'Ogbe* or "palace chiefs" are the senior officials of the *Oba's* household. There are 29 of these titles and, with the exception of *Obaruyiedo*, none is hereditary. They are divided up between the three palace associations which must be described before the position of the *Eghaevo n'Ogbe* can be understood.

The Palace Associations

The three palace associations (*otu-eguae*) are, in order of seniority, *Iwebo*, *Iweguae*, and *Ibiwe*. Each has special duties which its members perform in the royal household. The members of *Iwebo* are in charge of the *Oba's* wardrobe and the state regalia, and make and repair the coral bead garments and ornaments which are the mark of high rank. *Iweguae* provides the *Oba's* personal and domestic servants and the *Ibiwe* are the caretakers of the *erie* or harem, that is, of the *Oba's* wives and children.

Each *otu* has its own section of the palace which members of the others are not allowed to enter. The *Oba's* own living and sleeping quarters are in *Iweguae*.

Membership or affiliation to the *otu-eguae* is to be understood in two senses. First, any Benin man in the capital or the villages will claim to belong to one or other *otu* and to have inherited this affiliation from his father. This does not, however, imply participation in the society's activities or even the right to enter its apartments which is only obtained by an initiation ceremony.

Each *otu* has two senior grades, in which the members have individual titles, and three untitled grades.

	<i>Iwebo</i>	<i>Iweguae</i>	<i>Ibiwe</i>
Titled grades	{ <i>Eghaevo n'Ogbe</i> <i>Esacul uko n'Iwebo</i>	{ <i>Eghaevo n'Ogbe</i> <i>Esacue uko n'Iweguae</i>	{ <i>Eghaevo n'Ogbe</i> <i>Esacue uko n'Uheric</i>
Untitled grades	{ <i>Uko n'Iwebo</i> <i>Idafé</i> <i>Ibierugha</i>	{ <i>Uko n'Iweguae</i> <i>Idafé</i> <i>Ibierugha</i>	{ <i>Uko n'Uheric</i> <i>Idi3</i> <i>Ibierugha</i>

Admission into an *otu-eguae* and promotion through its grades are at the discretion of the *Oba* and the *Eghaevo n'Ogbe* of that *otu*. At each stage the candidate must pay fees and entertain his fellows and seniors. When he is being enrolled as an *ibierugha* a young man spends seven days in the palace at the end of which he is led home in procession by the other *ibierugha*. He then becomes liable to perform menial duties and to deliver messages for the *Oba* and chiefs of his *otu*. In the past the *ibierugha* were organized into companies which spent a few days on duty in the palace in rotation.

By promotion to *idafé* or *idi3* the individual gains more freedom and no longer sleeps at the *eguae* (palace). In *Iwebo* this grade provides the *emis* who are skilled in stringing coral beads and who are in charge of the palace stores. The *imuokpa*, bearers of sacrificial offerings at state ceremonies, are chosen from the *edafé* and *idi3* of *Iwebo* and *Ibiwe*. Others supervise the work of the *ibierugha*. The *enobore*, who support the *Oba's* arms when he is standing or walking, are selected from the best physical specimens among the *edafé* and *ibierugha* of *Iwebo* and *Iweguae*. The *emada* (sing. *omada*), the royal sword-bearers, who are presented to the *Oba* when children by their fathers, are attached to *Iweguae*.

The *uko* rank is a preliminary to the achievement of an individual title. Its holders perform important services for the *Oba*, such as presenting a village chief

to his subjects, and they are the official royal messengers; they do not live in the palace. They are distinguished from lower ranks by a hair-style which they share with all men of higher rank.

When a man has reached the rank of *ukò* he becomes eligible for an individual title, either among the *Exaeuè* or *Eghaevo n'Ogbe* of any *otu* or among the *Eghaevo n'Ore*. Whenever one of these titles becomes vacant through the death of the previous holder any *ukò* may ask the *Oba* to bestow it upon him. It is the *Oba's* prerogative to confer the title upon whom he pleases, though he normally consults the members of the association or order to which it belongs. Once the title has been awarded the candidate must pay fees (formerly in cowries—now in currency) to the *Oba* and both grades of *Eghaevo* and individually to a long list of chiefs before the title can be ceremonially conferred upon him at the *eguae*.

It is normal to hold one or more junior titles before securing one of the highest rank. An individual who acquires prominence and wealth through war, trade, "medicine," or some other pursuit, however, or attracts the *Oba's* favour by some other means, may be given a higher title even though he has not been initiated into any of the societies. Qualifications of this nature are more characteristic of aspirants to "town" titles. In such instances the candidate is allowed to pay the fees and complete the ceremonial qualifications for passing through all the grades immediately.

With the exception of initiated members of *Iweguae* (i.e., those who have become *Ibierugba*, see p. 37), an individual may transfer from one *otu* to another in search of advancement. An *otu* member who becomes an *Eghaevo n'Ore* retains membership but he no longer plays an active part in its activities. Most of the *Eghaevo n'Ore* titles can be held by members of any society but *Osumu* cannot belong to *Ibiwe*, nor *Esè* to *Iweguae* and *Obabafio* and the three hereditary titles (see above) are associated with *Iweguae*. The *Uzama*, except for *Olafè* who belongs to *Iweguae*, are formally admitted to *Iwebo*.

It is customary for the sons of an initiated and especially a titled member of an *otu-eguae* to be distributed between the three *otu*, a majority, including the senior son, entering their father's *otu*. Distribution may take place before or after the father's death, the *Oba* having the final decision in the latter case. The senior son of a prominent man might immediately be raised to *adafè* on the death of his father without going through the *ibierugba* stage.

The system is not a closed one, however. Any freeborn Edo can enter the palace as *ibierugba* if he can afford the necessary expenses of initiation and most Edo villages contain a few individuals who have reached the *ukò* grade. In particular hereditary village chiefs (*enigie*) must be initiated into one of the *otu* before taking up their titles and in the past this applied to vassal rulers farther afield. There are thus hundreds of initiated members of each association.

Leadership of the Palace Associations

The *Eghaevo n'Ogbe* are the leaders of the *otu-eguae*. There are 10 titles in *Iwebo*, nine in *Iweguae*, and 12 in *Ibiwe*. The members of *Iwebo* are grouped into nine "apartments" (*ugba*), seven of which are headed by *Eghaevo n'Ogbe* and the other two by *Exaeuè ukò n'Iwebo*. Each apartment is responsible for some portion of the palace stores and formerly had its own rooms where the stores were kept and where its members could meet. *Ibiwe* is divided into two branches, *Ibiwe proper*, with eight titles and *Eruric* with four.

Within each *otu* the *Eghaevo* titles rank roughly according to their supposed antiquity. However, any *Oba* has the recognized right to create a new title and advance it in the hierarchy, provided he does not disturb the first two titles in each list. The holders of these six titles, together with *Osoadi*, the head of *Eruric* (see above) are the most important *Eghaevo n'Ogbe*. They are:—

<i>Iwebo</i>	<i>Iweguae</i>	<i>Ibiwe</i>
<i>Unwagwe</i>	<i>Esere</i>	<i>Iue Osoadi</i>
<i>Eribo</i>	<i>Obazelu</i>	<i>Obazuaye</i>

Unwagwe as the senior title-holder of this order plays a leading role in state rituals and during the interregnum between the death of one *Oba* and the succession of his son he is the leading personage in the palace. *Osodi*, known as "the father of the *Oba*," has jurisdiction over all matters concerning the *Oba*'s wives (*ilo*)²⁰ while *Ise* has responsibility for the princes (*okoro*).

The title-holders of *Iwebo* and *Iweguae* formerly resided in the *Ogbe* half of the town but since only the *Oba* could be buried there they usually built a second house in *Ore n'axwa*. The *Ibiwe* chiefs, on the other hand, had their own ward in *Ore n'axwa*.

Other Title Orders

Apart from the *Uzama* and *Eghavuo* there are three subsidiary orders of state titles. Two of these are associated with the palace associations while the third has closer connections with the town chiefs.

Exaṣuē (or *egie uko n'Iwebo*, etc.). There are about 60 of these titles divided between *Iwebo*, *Iweguae*, and *Ibiwe* proper. With the exceptions of a few priestly titles (*egie-tso*) they are non-hereditary and are acquired in the same manner as *Eghavuo* titles, though with smaller fees. Their holders perform household, administrative, and ceremonial functions and some of them are closely associated with the duties of ward-guilds in Benin City. Of special interest are the "body-titles" (*egie-egbe*), most of which belong to this order. The holders of these titles represent different parts and qualities of the *Oba*'s person such as his torso (*erhalanye*), head (*okṣba*), feet (*ehana*), belly (*esa*), longevity (*otṣuē*), sense or judgment (*enwaḥ*), and eyes (*aro*). They form a kind of bodyguard for the king and are present on ritual occasions when they are anointed with sacrificial blood and treated with medicines in the same way as the *Oba* himself. In the past some of these title-holders were killed when the *Oba* died and if the *Oṣuē* (longevity) died before his master his body was walled up in a standing position until the king's death.

Urhoekakpa: this order, in which there are 10 titles, draws its members from the *Iwebo* and *Iweguae* associations. Eight of the titles are held in *Iwebo*, one in *Iwebo* or *Iweguae* and the remaining one in *Iweguae*. The senior "body-title," *Ekiṣba*, representing the *Oba*'s personal counterpart in the spirit world (see p. 58) belongs to this order but the head of *Urhoekakpa* is entitled *Ihata*. The latter's status in *Ogbe* is similar to the *Iyase*'s in *Ore n'axwa* and he is sometimes called *Iyase n'Ogbe*. The *Urhoekakpa* are closely connected with the *Ogbelaha* ward of *Ogbe* which provides musicians for state ceremonials and some of the titles may be taken by men from that ward.

Ibiwe n'axwa: these titles stand in much the same relation as the *Exaṣuē* to the *Eghavuo n'Ogbe* but the head of the order is a hereditary warrior chief ranking after the *Ezomo* and *Iyase* and equal in rank to the *Ologbo*; he formerly acted as second-in-command in campaigns waged by the *Iyase*. Most of the other titles are taken by descendants, through males of daughters of the *Oba* though they are not hereditary in any strict sense. They are an alternative to *Exaṣuē* titles as a stepping-stone to the *Eghavuo n'Ore* titles.

The *Oba*'s Wives

The most senior of the *Oba*'s wives (*ilo*) have titles (*egie-ilo*) which fall into two groups, *Eghavuo*, headed by the senior wife, *Eṣ*, and *egie-egbe* (body-titles), headed by *ekiṣba*.²¹ They do not, however, play any overt role in the affairs of the kingdom outside certain ritual contexts.

²⁰ Past *Oba* had hundreds of wives who were presented to them by vassal rulers and commoners throughout their dominions.

²¹ This title, it will be noted, is also held by a male chief. All the *ilo* titles, in fact, duplicate *Eghavuo* and body titles.

The Palace as a Political and Ceremonial Centre

The *Oba's* palace (*eguae-Oba*), which before the British conquest covered several acres of ground, was the centre of the political and ceremonial life of the Benin people. As will be clear from the above its internal organization was complex and its population large, consisting as it did of the *Oba* and his multifarious attendants and his numerous wives and children and their servants. Persons who had reached the rank of *ukw* in one of the palace organizations and, *a fortiori*, all chiefs with individual titles, did not live within the palace, however. They had their own houses distributed throughout the City and in the villages, where they were in touch with the commoner population. Each village or chiefdom and each ward in the capital had its own political organization but the dominating influence of the central political organization was such that any person of high rank living within one of these units would have considerable authority there.

Political deliberations at the palace were attended only by those of chiefly rank but the public rituals which took place in its outer courtyards or in the shrines of the past kings were open to commoners and the most important of them were attended by large numbers from the capital and the villages. Moreover, many of the wards of the capital and some villages outside had indispensable parts to play in these rituals. Finally, the fact that every man in the kingdom had a nominal affiliation to one of the palace associations helped to maintain sentiments of attachment to this focal centre of the state.

THE Oba

The sacred kingship is the focal point of the Benin political system. As the latest in the line of kings descending from *Eweka I.*, and the reincarnation of one of them, the *Oba* has his own divinity. His person is surrounded with mystery. Before the coming of British rule he left the palace only on important ceremonial occasions. It is forbidden (formerly under penalty of death) to say that he dies, sleeps, eats, or washes, all these ideas being expressed through metaphorical circumlocutions. The *Oba* is credited with all kinds of magical powers and the members of certain wards in Benin City are expressly concerned with maintaining these.

Formerly most of his time was taken up in state rituals, of which the most important were the annual sacrifices to his ancestors and to his own head. His head is equated with his good or bad fortune and with the well-being of the kingdom, and the sacrifices to it are followed by the treatment of all parts of his body with medicines designed to strengthen him against the coming year. The procedure at state rituals dramatizes the order of precedence between and within chiefly and other ranks in the state; groups and individuals make obeisance to the king in order of rank and seniority. He himself is set apart from and above the rest on a raised dais occupied only by himself, his wives and children and the *Ihogbe* who are priests of his ancestors and his own head.

Apart from the state rituals in Benin City the *Oba* maintains control over the cults of hero deities, performed by many village communities ostensibly on his behalf (see p. 56). These cults are directed to the spirits of former heroes in the state and in a few cases to particular aspects of past kings. The dates of annual festivals in their honour must be approved by the *Oba*, who frequently provides regalia and sacrificial offerings and in the case of the more important ones sends someone to represent him. He fixes, too, the dates for the performance of the annual rites in connection with domestic cults at all of which the final prayer is for the *Oba* himself.

Succession to the kingship is by primogeniture, the senior son validating his claim by performing his father's mortuary rites and having himself installed by the *Usama* at the site of the palace of *Eweka I.* Installation is followed by a mock battle between the *Oba's* followers and the supporters of *Ogiāwē*, the alleged descendant of the ruler of Benin at the time when *Oba Ewekdo* took possession of Benin City

and went to live at the site of the present palace. At the end of this battle he ritually divides the land with *Ogiāvē* (see p. 20). The *Oba*, once installed, cannot in principle be deposed. Wars of succession that occurred in the past are explained in terms of uncertainty as to which of the deceased *Oba*'s sons was the senior. It is the custom for each new *Oba* to make two or three of his immediately junior brothers the hereditary chiefs of villages within or (formerly) outside the kingdom. In the absence of sons the *Oba* may be succeeded by a brother.

The *Oba*'s court was formerly most elaborate, with hundreds of retainers living in the palace. One section of it is devoted to the king's wives, *iloi*, who, in the past, are said to have numbered several hundred. The harem, *erie*, has its own entrance, guarded by cripples. The wives are kept in strict seclusion except when they are sent outside to be cared for when ill or during pregnancy. They leave the palace only at night, under strict guard, and great care is taken to prevent them coming into contact with any man or even passing between two men. The *Oba* could claim any woman as his wife without marriage-payment, though it was customary for him to make presents to the parents. Men seeking the king's favours betrothed their daughters to him, that is gave him the right to marry them himself or to give them in marriage to any other person. Marriages with the daughters of vassal chiefs were arranged as a political measure.

Economic support for the palace organization and state rituals came from a variety of sources. Regular tribute of foodstuffs was levied twice yearly on all villages in the kingdom and in tributary areas and the *Oba* could call upon any village to provide labour for such tasks as building and repairing the palace. In addition special levies were made upon villages and on chiefs in Benin City when circumstances demanded sacrifices for the good of the nation. Apart from the regular collection of tribute through chiefs in Benin City, the *Oba* could send his own palace officials directly to the villages to make special levies. Each of the seven gates leading into the capital was guarded by a titled chief whose servants collected tolls from all persons entering and exacted from persons coming to trade there customary dues in proportion to the amount of produce they carried. In the trade with Europeans the *Oba* had a monopoly of certain exports and he maintained a rigid control over all transactions. Fees from prospective title-holders were a further source of income and court fines were another. Theoretically all slaves captured in war were the *Oba*'s property, though it was customary for him to distribute most of them to the warriors and to others whom he wished to favour. Directly, and through the palace associations, the *Oba* maintained control over the craft guilds in Benin City and had first call on their services; these he rewarded with gifts in slaves, kind, and money. Finally fresh wealth could be obtained through the sacking by the national armies of rebellious or unconquered towns and villages.²²

Apart from his ritual and economic prerogatives there are certain well-defined mechanisms through which the *Oba* maintains or maintained his position as political head of state. At his succession each *Oba*, in the past, sent pieces of chalk to all vassal chiefs and village headmen. Refusal to accept this was construed as rebellion and would lead in time to an attempt at reconquest. The heir of an *onogie* could succeed only with the *Oba*'s approval which was signified by royal assent to the performance of his predecessor's mortuary rites. In most cases the heir was then summoned to Benin to spend a period in the palace where he was instructed in his duties as the *Oba*'s agent. When the *Oba* delegated to a chief powers of life and death over his own subjects this was marked by the presentation to him of the ceremonial sword, *ada*. This right was not given to all *enigie*, especially within the Benin kingdom.

A strong *Oba* had ample opportunities for manipulating the state title system. As has been noted above most of the important state titles are non-hereditary and within the *Oba*'s gift. He has the prerogative of creating new titles and, within

²² At the present day the *Oba* receives a salary from the Native Administration funds.

certain limits, of determining their rank and the extent of authority that goes with them. Moreover, in the past, he had the right of redistributing tribute-collecting units (see below) associated with titles and was thus a main source of opportunity to acquire wealth. His economic backing, too, was such as to make his favour worthwhile. His goodwill was the surest path to influence and prosperity.

On the other hand, limits are set to the exercise of royal power. Any attempt, on the king's behalf, to override national traditions, as, for example, by abolishing an important title or institution, is liable to meet with strong opposition even at the present day. The three main groups of title-holders—especially the town chiefs who tend to represent the independently wealthy and influential section of the population—can exert pressure on the *Oba*. The actual power enjoyed by any particular *Oba* depends on his ability to balance the powerful groups in the state and to draw influential individuals into his own service. It is traditional for the king to marry daughters to a number of the most important title-holders. Thus a brother-in-law relation, with all it implies in terms of obligations of assistance and support, is created between him and them.

The *Oba* was formerly the official source of all legislation and state policy; he alone could take the decision to prosecute a war and all national campaigns were carried out in his name. The warrior chiefs were responsible directly to him and historical traditions assert that, with the occasional exception of the *Iyase*, they were remarkably loyal. The *Oba* in consultation with the most important title-holders was court of appeal for the whole kingdom. Theoretically any subject could bring his case to the king's notice though his actual ability to do so seems to have depended to a large extent on his gaining the support of an influential title-holder or palace official. Over most of the kingdom the right to apply the death penalty was reserved to the *Oba* himself and where this was not so it was expressly delegated to his agent.

In the last analysis the basis of the *Oba's* power appears to lie in the traditional mystical values attaching to the sacred institution of kingship and to the *egwae* (palace). The latter is the hub of the nation. Individuals all over the kingdom claim to belong to one or other of the palace associations and the highest position to which anyone can aspire is to be "next to the *Oba*," a claim which is made, with some degree of truth, by, and on behalf of, the heads of many groups within the state. Over a wide area outside the kingdom the ultimate validation of authority or of an institution or custom is that "we brought it from Benin" or that "the *Oba* gave it to us."

ADMINISTRATION OF THE *Oba's* TERRITORIES

The whole territory ruled by the *Oba* both inside and outside the Benin kingdom was formerly divided into a large number of tribute units. These generally, but not invariably, corresponded to local territorial groupings. A chiefdom, village-group, village, ward, and any combination of these and even collections of individuals dispersed between the different wards of a village²² might constitute a single unit.

Each unit was under the control of a person at Benin City, in most cases the holder of a title. From the point of view of the village this person was "he who salutes the *Oba* for the village," that is, he acted as the intermediary between the people and their king and, in particular, between the latter and the village headman. As such he transmitted the *Oba's* orders and it was his duty to bring the wishes of the villagers to the *Oba's* notice. Thus appeals to the *Oba's* court were made through him. Theoretically, according to most accounts, he had no right to settle these on his own account though it is clear that he often did so. His main duty, however, was to organize the yearly or twice-yearly tribute of yams, palm-oil, meat, livestock,

²² An example of this is provided by the *ossina*, the king's carpenters, who were scattered in various villages and who were under the control of the holder of the *Arase* title.

and other foodstuffs to the *Oba*. When this became due he informed the village headman who directed the collection of the dues from each household. These were then carried by the *iroghae* to the house of the agent in Benin whose duty it was to conduct them or to send one of his servants to conduct them to the palace. According to different accounts he himself kept back a portion of the tribute or tribute was paid separately to him.

These agents were mainly the holders of *Eghaevo* titles and the *Edaikh* (heir-apparent) and *Iyoba* (queen-mother). Some of the *Uzama* (especially the *Ezomo*), the holders of minor titles and even non-titled palace officials, however, also performed this function. While the heir-apparent and queen-mother acted as the *Oba*'s agents in respect of some villages, it appears likely that others were assigned to them exclusively for the upkeep of their courts, though this did not affect the political allegiance of those villages to the *Oba*. The same may have been true of some villages attached to *Uzama* titles. Any chief or non-titled man of Benin City could, in addition, have personal slaves farming for him in village-areas, the produce of the farms belonging to him exclusively. Such slaves were usually attached to a particular village in which case they also became responsible for contributing to the village tribute.

Certain features of this system appear to have been designed to prevent high-ranking title-holders from acquiring too much power or establishing private domains. The agents were not expected to make regular visits to the areas under their control but to stay in Benin City where they received deputations and conducted them to the *Oba*. They sent their servants out to the villages and sometimes stationed them there permanently. Secondly, the tribute units associated with a particular title or office were dispersed and any agent might be responsible for villages in all parts of the kingdom. Moreover, most of the titles and offices were non-hereditary so that there was little tendency for particular villages to become permanently associated with particular noble families in Benin. Then, again, the *Oba* had the right of redistributing tribute units either as a means of preventing the accumulation of influence or so as to be able to reward some other person. Finally, the king himself had messengers whom he sent out to report to him directly and in some cases he stationed his own agents permanently in tributary towns and villages.

The traditional administrative system is now defunct, though in the few cases where tribute units were associated with hereditary titles some ties of loyalty remain.

THE STATE COUNCIL

In the past most of the day-to-day administration of the kingdom appears to have been conducted by private consultation and negotiation between the *Oba* and the senior title-holders. For more important matters, such as the promulgation of new laws, the decision to conduct wars, the fixing of the dates of important festivals, the creation of new titles, the raising of special levies, and the taking of ritual measures to prevent epidemics, etc., a full state council was called. This consisted of the *Uzama*, both groups of *Eghaevo*, and, in a subsidiary capacity, the minor ranks of title-holders. When the *Oba* intended to announce an important decision he summoned this council and put his views before it. Each group met separately to discuss its attitude, then a second meeting was called at which the leaders of each group expressed its views.

Generally speaking the *Eghaevo n'Ogbe*, and, in particular, their six senior members, appear to have been the *Oba*'s closest advisers. They were the group who had the closest ties with the palace and who depended most on the *Oba*'s patronage. The *Eghaevo n'Ore*, on the other hand, included a proportion of men who had achieved prosperity and influence independently of the palace and, in a sense, they formed an opposition group. Their leader, the *Iyase*, frequently appears in opposition to the *Oba* in Edo historical traditions and his office was undoubtedly the most influential in the state, after the kingship. Traditionally the *Oba* wields

over the *Iyase* the sanction of sending him to war, in which case he is not expected to return but to settle down at some distance from Benin City. The *Uzama*, as a group, do not appear to have had great political power immediately before the British conquest though the *Ezomo*, *Ero*, and *Obi* all had considerable influence. The *Ezomo* as the regular generalissimo of the state is pictured in Edo traditions as being essentially loyal to the *Oba* and appears to have supported the latter in opposition to the *Iyase*.

THE MILITARY ORGANIZATION

Military campaigns were regularly undertaken to effect conquest and more particularly, in the last two centuries, to reconquer rebellious vassals. Each campaign was preceded by an elaborate ceremony in Benin City and a prolonged period of magical preparations. The more important campaigns are said to have taken many years.

The warrior chiefs belonged to the *Uzama*, *Eghaevo*, and *Ekaive* groups. Most of the major campaigns were directed by the *Ezomo* with the *Ologbosi* as second-in-command. The latter appears to have played a tactical and the former a strategical role. Each of the warrior chiefs had a select core of warriors attached to his household. The remainder of the force was recruited from the followers of other chiefs and from the villages. The members of the *Ibiwe* palace association, in particular, were noted as warriors and certain villages had strong warrior traditions. Arms were provided by the warriors themselves, by the chiefs who recruited them, and by the state. The *Ezomo* had a number of European cannon in his charge.

For long campaigns the warriors built camps within striking distance of the enemy. They were fed by crops which they grew themselves, by levies on subject villages, and with the loot captured in successful attacks. Many villages within the kingdom and outside are said to have been founded by warriors who did not return home after fighting a campaign.

On the outskirts of the kingdom there are a number of settlements founded for the purpose of repelling raiders. They are recognizable from the title, *okakuo* (*okao*, leader; *okuo*, war), borne by their headmen, or by other individuals.

When a community submitted or was conquered its headman might be confirmed in his position or replaced by a local or Benin man. It was then assigned as a tribute unit to some title- or office-holder in Benin City.

LAND TENURE

All the land of the Benin kingdom is said, by the Edo, to belong to the *Oba*. Such statements refer primarily to his position as the political ruler of the territory rather than to his actual control over the use of land. The land is vested in him as trustee for the whole people and his "ownership" of it in this sense is symbolized at the installation of each new *Oba* when after a mock battle to capture the city Chief *Ogiav* puts oil into his palm. As the actual controller of particular blocs of territory he emerges, as far as the native Edo are concerned, only with reference to the allocation of building sites in Benin City. To-day, as the president of the Native Authority, he exercises control over the occupation and use of land and resources in Benin Division by strangers.

Outside Benin City the village is the typical land-holding unit, though in many cases no boundaries between the territories of different villages are recognized. Within the village no smaller group is recognized to have permanent rights over any tract of land. A native of a village may farm anywhere on village land without seeking permission from anyone, so long as the piece of land he chooses is not occupied by another's crops. The only exception to this rule occurs where an individual intimates his intention to clear land progressively in a given direction over a period of years, in which case no other person should obstruct him by making a farm across

his intended path. If disputes arise as a result of this kind of situation they are settled by the village council, though in fact they are very rare. Indeed, litigation over the ownership of land as such is non-existent outside Benin City except in a political context where, for example, two *enigie* dispute their common boundaries. Litigation which at first sight appears to involve disputed land rights proves invariably to refer to the ownership of permanent crops, such as rubber and cocoa, rather than the land itself.

No rights in fallow land are recognized. Once a man has cleared land, planted it over two or three years and then let it go fallow, it reverts to the community though it is not likely to be re-cleared till some years later. In fact some individuals return to the same piece of land after a period of years but they do not thereby establish any additional claim to it.

An Edo who wishes to farm on the land of a village other than his own must seek the permission of the *onogie* or *adiwere* to do so. He presents gifts to them in kind or cash, which they should share with the *edi*, and must continue to do so each year unless he settles in the village permanently. In the latter case he is accepted on equal terms with other villagers and may even be given two or three years' exemption from the tasks appropriate to his age-grade in order to establish himself.

Freemen of Benin City claim that they had the right, in the past, to farm anywhere on the *Oba's* land. In practice, farms appear to have been established in two main ways. In the first case they could make an arrangement with the headman of an existing village to station their farm-workers there and to farm on the village land. These dependents usually cultivated their own farms as well as working for their masters and they or their descendants would eventually become absorbed in the village community. Alternatively a wealthy chief with many slaves might clear virgin forest outside the control of any village and establish a camp there to house his slaves and other dependents. They too were allowed to cultivate on their own behalf. The slaves or their children would eventually purchase their emancipation and the camp develop into a village with the usual type of village social organization.

The cultivation of permanent crops has brought about some changes in the traditional pattern of land rights though, theoretically, it has not resulted in individual ownership of the land. After the British captured Benin City and deposed the *Oba* the most prominent chiefs and other influential men were encouraged to make rubber and oil-palm plantations. Many acquired *de facto* rights in considerable tracts of land. Village headmen have continued to allow prominent natives from the capital to acquire land which they have planted with cash and food crops worked by their dependents and hired labourers, often of non-Edo origin. A number of individuals possess several hundred acres of such plantations.

Villages were encouraged by the Administration to establish communal labour plantations but these were eventually converted to individual ownership. It became the custom for each farmer to plant rubber and cocoa on land going out of food-production and despite the more recent efforts of the Native Authority to halt the wholesale conversion of land from food production to cash crops, this still goes on to some extent.

Once planted, permanent crops can be alienated by the owner by sale, pledge, or mortgage, though, in theory, the land on which they are grown is not involved in the transaction.

Before 1897 the only non-Edo in a position to exploit the resources of the kingdom were those who settled in villages and became absorbed into the village community. After that date there was an influx of members of neighbouring tribes seeking land for farming and residence and the right to fish and collect palm-produce. Various regulations have been drawn up for controlling the rights of non-Edo in land-use, forest and river resources, and house sites, and fixed annual charges are made for each type of activity.²⁴

²⁴ For details see Rowling.

The allocation of house sites in Benin City was traditionally in the hands of the *Oba*, who would, however, usually consult the chiefs or elders of the ward in which the proposed building was to take place. The site was inspected and approved and its boundaries demarcated on the *Oba*'s behalf by a special ward-guild known as *Ariogbe* which also provided the town criers and performed some ceremonial functions.

At the present day an Edo who wishes to acquire a site must seek the recommendation of the elders of the ward in which it is located after having it surveyed and a plan made by the N.A. Surveyor. This plan, once accepted and certified, becomes, in effect, a title deed and its owner may, in practice, dispose of it in whatever way he desires. There is considerable speculation in both houses and house sites and a number of individuals are building houses for lease, especially to European employees of commercial firms.

PROPERTY AND WEALTH

Before the coming of British rule the non-perishable material property which could be owned by individuals included, principally, houses, household utensils, tools and weapons, cloths and other garments, beads and ornaments, and slaves. All these could be bought and sold or otherwise alienated by their owners and were inherited individually by the latter's heirs on his death. The larger bronzes whose production and distribution was theoretically controlled by the *Oba*, were limited to persons of high rank and do not appear to have been regularly transferred. Certain kinds of red stone beads were in the gift of the *Oba* and could only be acquired and worn as a privilege conferred by him; they were returnable to his treasury on the death of the person to whom they were awarded.

Internal exchange was conducted through the medium of cowrie shells though brass bracelets known as *manillas* were in use at an earlier period. There was an elaborate accounting system for cowrie shells which were stored in large bags, the traditional value of each of which is 6s. 6d. For trade with Europeans prices were fixed in terms of a unit known as a "paw" or "pagne," the former word being probably derived from the Edo *uhpá*, a cloth.²²

Apart from their export in earlier times, slaves were kept, by those who could afford them, for labouring duties in the household and on farms. Those captured in warfare were distributed by the *Oba* to his subjects in return for services rendered to him; the brass-smiths, for example, might be paid in slaves for the larger bronzes which they produced. Alternatively slaves could be acquired by purchase. Children born to slave women were the property of their mother's master and all slaves were inherited by their owners' heirs. Apart from their duties to their owners they were allowed to farm and trade on their own account and many eventually became independent enough to secure their emancipation by making payments in cash or kind or by purchasing replacements for themselves; some slaves themselves owned slaves.

Children could be pledged for debt, being returnable to their parents when the debt was redeemed.

At the present day there are additional forms of property apart from funds of currency. Among the more important of these are bicycles, cars and commercial vehicles, sewing machines and capital equipment for the exploitation of timber.

INHERITANCE

The rules of inheritance vary to some extent from area to area. Generally speaking a man's food and cash crops, movable goods and wealth are divided in diminishing proportions between the senior sons of each of his wives who are expected to make gifts out of them to their own full brothers. Should he wish, a man may arrange the division before his death in which case oaths are sworn to ensure that

²² See Ling Roth, 1903, chap. XIII.

his wishes are adhered to; he has, however, no right to disinherit totally any of his heirs. Otherwise the distribution is supervised after his death by the head of the extended family.

The house in which the father lived passes to his senior son who must, however, validate his claim to pass it on to his own son by organizing and bearing the greater part of the cost of his father's mortuary rites. Even so he has no moral right to debar his brothers from living in the house and, at the present day, his right to dispose of it without their consent is sometimes successfully challenged in the courts. If he already has a house of his own he may remain there and allow his younger brothers to occupy their father's house.

Widows who have living children are generally free to return to their families or to marry whom they choose. Those without issue are inherited in the same way as movable property and the senior son inherits his father's rights as a suitor. The wives of the *Oba* or some other hereditary chiefs, who have borne children, should not remarry or have sexual relations with any other man and in some cases the widows of *exigie* should not enter into any kind of sexual relations with one of the latter's subjects.

Where there are no sons a man's junior brothers become his heirs. It is the custom that no man inherits from his junior. If the sons are all minors the brother may take charge of the property and use it for his own benefit, though in doing so he takes upon himself the obligation to care for them and to provide them with wives.

A woman's property is inherited in the same way except that her daughters may receive a share in her household utensils, cloths, etc. If she has no children, her brothers and sisters are her heirs.

THE LIFE CYCLE**

BIRTH

For the birth of her first child a woman often returns to her mother and she may do so for subsequent ones. When she is known to have conceived her husband may offer sacrifices to her father's and his own ancestors and to other spirits or deities under whose protection the child is believed to be. The woman is treated with certain medicines, wears special amulets, and dresses her hair in appropriate patterns. The customs attending the actual birth vary considerably. Generally there is no stipulation as to the place of birth or as to who should be present. The child is washed with sand and palm-oil—to ensure that it will not smell when it grows up—and with water, and the mother herself is washed in the backyard. When the cord falls from the child the father plants it in the ground with the seed of a kola or coconut tree in the hope that the child will grow like the tree; in some cases the tree becomes the child's property. The placenta is buried inside or outside the house and great care is taken to make the hole big enough for it to spread out evenly. This ensures both that the child will go through life smoothly and that the woman's womb will be healthy.

About three months after the birth the woman washes, puts fine clothes on herself and the baby, and takes it to market for the first time. There she makes offerings to the *ed3* of the market, that is to the spirits of women who have traded there in the past, and receives gifts from the market women. Shortly afterwards she takes the child to the river and makes offerings to the deity associated with it. Henceforth the child can accompany her to either place.

** The information in this section relates mainly to commoners. It is not possible to enumerate here the differences of detail sometimes found between commoners and persons of higher rank.

NAMING CEREMONIES

The rites accompanying the naming of a child (*izumo*) vary considerably, but normally take place on the seventh day after the birth. In the morning the father or his father or senior brother presents the child to his ancestors, making offerings and praying that it will grow up safely. The baby is usually lowered a number of times over the altar of the ancestor. In some cases a special medicine is prepared some of which is rubbed on the child and the rest included in an amulet which it will wear throughout its life. The father then "counts" the child into its mother's arms, charging her to take care of it for him. In many families the women of the household call in their neighbours to hold a dance the same evening. The dances imitate the series of events that bring about the making of a child and there are special songs expressing the hope that the child will grow safely and be a credit to its parents and the joy that a successful birth evokes. The senior woman present prays to the collective ancestor spirits for the child's well-being and its head is touched to the ground seven times in token of its submission to them. Names are given by the father and by anyone else who cares to do so. Yams which were placed by the child's head on the bed on the day of birth are divided between the women present, the head of one of them being reserved to the woman who first washed it. To these the father adds meat, wine, kola, and coconut, all of which are shared out in order of seniority.

INFANCY TO ADOLESCENCE

Babies are continually nursed by their mothers, grandmothers, and elder siblings, and their fathers and grandfathers frequently fondle them. Weaning takes place at from two to three years or earlier if the mother bears another child.

Up to the age of six or seven boys and girls play together. At seven or eight the boys begin to accompany their fathers regularly to the farm and gradually learn male skills. Girls go with their mothers and elder sisters to the farm, to fetch wood and water and to market; they quickly learn to carry small loads on their heads.

The circumcision of boys and clitoridectomy of girls takes place in infancy or early childhood; it is performed without ceremony by specialists from Benin City. There are no puberty rites for either sex.

MARRIAGE

In the old days most girls were betrothed to their future husbands in infancy or childhood and in the villages this practice is still common though there is a growing tendency to allow both boys and girls a voice in choosing their own partners.

The traditional process of marriage is as follows. When a baby girl is born suitors may begin to approach her parents for her hand, sending to them a log of wood and a bundle of yams; this is known as *iwu-omo*, "asking for the child." Ideally a man should obtain a first wife for each of his sons and it is common for men to have girls betrothed to themselves with the object of securing them for sons who are still minors. When the father of the girl, with the approval of his own father or senior brother, has chosen a suitable man, he informs him of the date of the formal betrothal. The suitor prepares gifts which in some villages consist of a jar of palm-wine, two trays of sliced coconut with two kola-nuts on each and 2s. These are taken to the altar of the girl's patrilineal ancestors to notify them of the betrothal. The suitor kneels before the girl's father who says "We give the child to you."

Henceforth the suitor should give "service" (*ugāwē*) to his prospective parents-in-law, giving presents of yams to the father and mother each year, helping the former on his farm, providing the mother with firewood, etc. To-day these services are not always performed but "good" sons-in-law make periodical gifts of money, cloth, etc.

When the girl has passed puberty the father informs the suitor that the time for him to claim her is approaching. When a date has been fixed the latter prepares more gifts of wine, kola, and coconut as further offerings to the ancestors of the girl to notify them that the marriage is about to take place and to ask their help in making it a fruitful and prosperous one. It is at this stage that the groom or his father makes the marriage-payment of £12 to the girl's father, together with gifts for the mother and for the "people in the house." The marriage contract is sealed by the payment of 2s. which is called *anyo-imizim*—"the wine of receiving the child"; this represents the price, in the old days, of a bottle of gin. Some of the coconut and kola is given to the groom to take back as a presentation to his own ancestors.

A day is then fixed for the ceremony of *irhiokharie*, "taking the bride to her husband." The latter's relatives and friends gather at his house to dance and sing. Meanwhile the girl is conducted by her brothers, sisters, and friends, carrying her property, to the husband's house. Her father and mother do not come for, it is said, they are too sorrowful at losing a daughter and this should be a joyful occasion. On arrival the bride, feigning shyness, is placed in her husband's lap by her brother. The husband's senior wife, if he has one, or some other woman in the house brings a bowl of water in which money or cowries have been placed and washes the bride's hands. This rite symbolizes the acceptance of her into the household and the money expresses the hope that the marriage will be a fruitful one. She is then led away to be bathed and to eat a solitary meal. The husband then entertains the bride's party and makes gifts to them, some for themselves and some to take back to his parents-in-law. The bridal party leaves and the husband continues to entertain his own people with feasting and dancing.

About two days later the husband goes to thank the parents of his bride and is entertained by them. A few days later the father pays a return visit. On the seventh day after the bride's arrival her mother comes to see her, and to demand the cloth on which the pair slept on the first night. If the girl proved to be a virgin the cloth is given to the mother and she receives presents in cash and is entertained by the husband.

The same day the bride cleans the walls of the husband's ancestor shrine and prayers are said for her. It is on this day too that she enters the kitchen and cooks for the first time. About three months later she pays her first visit to her parents.

At first the girl is put to live with another of the husband's wives or with his mother or some other woman in the house and may remain with them until she has borne her first child. Then she is given a room of her own.

At the present day a woman can divorce her husband simply by repaying the marriage-payment in the Native Court or by finding a lover who is willing to pay it for her. The husband usually makes a claim for refund of the additional money that he has spent on her. A man can send away his wife at will but if he does so he loses all that he has spent on her.

AGE-GRADE PROMOTION CEREMONIES²⁷

In most villages there is no ceremonial at the appointment of new *iroghas* or at promotion to *ighele*, though in some there may be small payments on the latter occasion. The candidates are simply called before the *onogie*, where present, and *adiwere*, informed of their new duties, told who their leaders will be, and advised to be obedient to them. The leaders themselves are taken to the shrine of the collective ancestors of the village where the *adiwere* makes prayers on their behalf, asking that no-one will seek to harm them in revenge for the orders they give or the penalties they inflict.

²⁷ This section applies only to the villages.

When a man wishes to become *adi* he visits the *onogie* and all the *edi* twice, seeking their support. In one village he pays 12s. to the *onogie*, 1s. and a bundle of yams to the *adiwere* and a bundle of yams to each of the other three *edime*. On the day before elevation to the new status he performs some task such as sweeping round the *edi* shrine or clearing a path. Any elder whom he has fought in the past may request that he should be fined for the offence; the *onogie* and *adiwere* decide whether the charge is true and if so order him to pay the fine.

On the appointed day the candidate takes a tray of sliced coconut on which he places four kola-nuts, two jars of palm-wine, and 2s. to the *edi* shrine. There he kneels before the altar with the tray in his hands, prays for himself, the *edi*, the *onogie*, the village, and the *Oba*. The *adiwere* prays for him, too, then calls his name four times. At the fourth call he replies and the *adiwere* says "The *Oba* makes you *adi*, the village makes you *adi*, the *onogie* makes you *adi*; may you live long, may you stay a long time with us." He is then lowered on to the altar four times. In villages where there is an *onogie* a similar rite is performed at the shrine of the past *enogie*.

When a new *adiwere* is appointed he visits every household in the village asking the people to come and dance for him. The dance lasts throughout the night and the candidate provides as much refreshment as he can afford for all the people. At daybreak he takes a goat, a cock, and a tortoise to the *edi* shrine, together with a tray of coconut on which four kola-nuts are placed. The goat is sacrificed to the *edi* spirits, the tortoise at the nearby shrine of the earth (*of*), and the cock at the shrine to the high god (*Osanobua*) which is located at the *edi* shrine.

The sacrificial meat is used as the basis of a feast in which the whole village takes part, portions being set aside for the *adiwere* himself, the *onogie*, the age-grades, and the women.

DEATH AND MORTUARY RITES

Mortuary rites differ according to clan, locality, and the status and rank of the deceased. For the Edo the ideal is that parents should predecease their children and senior siblings their juniors. Children of the deceased should perform the mortuary rites, with the senior son playing the leading role, and no person plays an active part in the funeral rites for someone junior to himself. Children and childless adults are buried unceremoniously by the *ighele* or *iroghae* in the villages and by their equivalents in Benin City. In the villages household heads and others who die leaving children are buried inside the house or, occasionally, under the eaves. Other senior and respected adults may be buried there, too, but usually their graves are in the bush. In Benin City, at the present day, most burials take place in the public cemeteries and only very prominent people may be buried, with the *Oba*'s permission, in their houses. No person other than the *Oba* may be buried in the *Ogbe* section of the town.

When full mortuary rites are accorded they take seven days in the case of ordinary people and 14 for the *Oba* and some important chiefs. They may be performed immediately after the decease or, if the senior son is too young or cannot afford the necessary expense, be delayed indefinitely; thus some funerals take place as much as 20 years after interment. The following is a description of the main stages of the mortuary rites for an ordinary adult man with sons.

Immediately after the death lamentation is forbidden for a few hours for the soul of the deceased may be lurking round the house and it is hoped that it will return to the body. When it is clear that death is final the people in the house and other relatives and friends begin to weep and wail. The body is taken outside and washed, then laid on a bed inside the house. The hair and nails are cut and, if the funeral rites are not to take place immediately, preserved by the senior son, usually in a block of "chalk." A goat is sacrificed and the body anointed with the blood. The corpse is then adorned with bracelets of cowries and a white cloth and a feather

is stuck into the hair. Formerly it was laid on a frame of bamboo and the whole wrapped in a mat but at the present day coffins are commonly used. Meanwhile the *ighele* have dug the grave. If the grave is in the cemetery the children of the deceased go there in procession with the corpse, singing seven special burial songs and scattering chalk, salt, and cowries on the way. As the body is lowered into the grave the senior son, then the other children, throw in bristles from a broom, accompanying each with prayers to the effect that in the next incarnation the deceased may not meet with the misfortunes that troubled him in the last. Finally a hen is killed and its blood used to wash from the feet of the mourners those impurities and ritual dangers associated with the grave. It is taken away to be eaten by the grave-diggers who also wash, with water, "the feet with which they entered the grave, the arms with which they dug it, and the face with which they looked on the corpse."

If the full mortuary rites are to be performed immediately these rites constitute the first day. Otherwise the seven-day funeral begins with the rite of "laying out the corpse" (*isawofu*) at which only members of the deceased's lineage are allowed to be present. The nails and hair which have been preserved from the dead man are tied, with chalk, salt, and cowries, in a white cloth into which a white feather is inserted. Over this bundle, which represents the corpse, a goat is slaughtered. The seven burial songs are sung and the "body" is interred.

During the following days goats, fowls, and other offerings provided by the male descendants and sons-in-law of the deceased are sacrificed in the courtyard of the house. The burial songs are repeated night and morning.

On the third day there is a procession known as *isaxwe*. The senior son slaughters a cow or goat on the threshold of the house for the *edi* spirits of the family. Then he and each of his brothers and brothers-in-law and, sometimes, his adult sons and daughters or their husbands, place themselves at the head of groups of dependents and friends which march round the town in order of seniority of their leaders, to the accompaniment of burial and other songs in honour of the deceased.

On the fifth day there is another procession (*isofu*) organized in the same way. This time the leader of each group is accompanied by a box (*okū*) decorated with a red cloth and brass adornments which represents the prosperity of the deceased and the respect accorded to him; the *okū* is not always used in village burials. The leader takes with him offerings (*ofu*) the main components of which are a goat, a calabash of oil, basket of coconuts, seven kola-nuts, a mat, and a white cloth. On the return of the procession to the house each leading mourner presents his *ofu* to the assembled elders of the lineage who inspect them to see if they are complete; if not a sum of money is offered in compensation. When they are satisfied a mortar is fired and the followers of the mourner dance as a sign of rejoicing that they have not been disgraced. The senior son retains his *ofu* while those of other mourners are afterwards divided between the elders and the heirs.

A dance (*ikpowa*) begins on the evening of the following day and will continue until daybreak. A person, chosen by divination, is dressed up in fine clothes to represent the deceased. He or she is known as *onadierhayi*—"he (she) that represents the father." On no account must this person sleep during the night; if he does so it is believed that he will dream of the deceased and will himself shortly die. During the night he sits on a bench in the house while all "his" descendants come, in order of seniority, to salute him, bringing monetary offerings and receiving kola and, through a spokesman, blessings and an assurance that he will continue to look after them from *eril* (the spirit world) as he has done on earth. This done "the father" dances with his children for the last time.

At dawn the people, led by the "father," go in procession to a nearby area of bush where a framework of sticks, covered with a cloth, has been erected. The "father" pretends to sit on these, then the other mourners do likewise. Finally the structure collapses and its components are thrown away. This rite, known as *isuerhūjua* ("throwing away the sticks"), symbolizes the final disposal of the

remains of the deceased and the casting off of ritual impurities associated with death from the mourners. The subsequent state of ritual purity is expressed in the song "it is cool like the bush near the river" which accompanies the homeward procession. As the mourners reach the house a mortar is fired to induce the "father's" spirit to come home and his representative traces a line with powdered chalk to the shrine where he will be worshipped.

A few hours later the senior son and his father's senior surviving brother perform the rite known as *akòvè*, "planting," in which carved staffs, *axurhe*, are placed upright on the altar of the deceased. A goat is sacrificed and other offerings made and the "father" is asked to continue to come there and eat with his "children" who come in their turn to pray for themselves, their spouses, and their dependents.

Apart from these mortuary rites which are the concern of the deceased's siblings and descendants his membership of other kinds of groups is also signified after his death. Thus a goat must be presented by the senior son to the people of the village for sacrifice for the *edìs* spirits (see below) and to the members of any cult-group or title-association or order of which he was a member. An *onogie's* son must present goats to each of the villages of which his father was the ruler, to his palace-association, etc.

The funeral rites of the *Oba* follow the same general pattern but are too elaborate to be described here.

RELIGION, MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT

The Edo of the Benin kingdom think of the universe as being divided into two parts, *agbè*, the actual visible world in which men live, and *erùl* the invisible abode of numerous deities, spirits, and supernatural powers. For the purposes of this Survey these supernatural beings and entities are classified into four main groups:—

1. Deities who have never been incarnated as human beings.
2. Spirits of the departed.
3. Hero-deities associated with natural features of the environment.
4. Personal spirits and powers.

DEITIES

All Edo believe in a high god, *Osanobua* or *Osa*, the creator of all things and beings in *agbè* and *erùl*. In the mythology he is pictured as a king, living in splendour with many wives and children; among his children are other deities and the first kings of Ife, Benin, and other Yoruba towns and of "the Europeans." Any person may pray to *Osa* for health, children, and other benefits. Normally he or she makes a small heap of sand into which is inserted a stick adorned with a strip of white cloth. There offerings of kola, chalk, and a fluted gourd, which is said to represent a cow, are placed; actual blood sacrifices are unusual. In a few villages, however, *Osa* is the object of a special cult conducted by a recognized priest; sometimes he is represented by a mud figure in the garb and regalia of an *Oba*. In Benin City there are three shrines of *Osanobua* which are sometimes said to be on the sites of churches built by the Portuguese in the 16th century. Their guardian, the *Okèsa*, is reported to have worn a cross. Otherwise it is difficult to discover what the worship of *Osanobua* owes to Portuguese influence. A few years ago the *Oba* reorganized the worship of *Osanobua*, founded "The Church of Holy Aruosa" (*aru*, shrine), and appointed a chief priest with assistants. Services are held each Sunday and their procedure is based to some extent on that of Christian churches. Use is made, however, of traditional Edo symbols and music and a creed and scriptures which are based on Benin traditions and written by the *Oba* himself.

The cult of *Olokū* who, in the mythology, is the senior son of *Osanobua*, plays a greater role in Benin religious life. *Olokū* is identified with the sea (*okā*), that is

with the great waters of the earth which are said to have their source in the Ethiopie (*Olokū*) River. Into this river, which rises near the town of Urhonigbe in the south-east corner of the kingdom, all the rivers of the world are believed to flow; its immediate tributaries are identified in the mythology as *Olokū's* wives. At Urhonigbe, which is the main centre of the cult, there is a large temple in which are housed life-size clay figures of *Olokū*, represented as an *Oba*, with his retinue and wives. The cult is directed by a priestess, who has other women to help her, and a priest who is the village headman. The whole town engages in an annual festival of worship (*ugie*) of a kind more characteristic of the cults of hero-deities in other Benin villages.

In a few other villages, too (including Ughoton, the old port of Benin), *Olokū* worship is a community affair. Elsewhere it is a domestic cult. Every household has its *Olokū* altars, constructed out of mud and painted white, and some chiefly houses have special rooms dedicated to the deity with images similar to those at Urhonigbe. Every woman in the house has her own small altar and there is sometimes a central one at which the household head himself worships. The women's altars are installed usually just before or just after marriage. In a sense all women who have had altars installed are priestesses of *Olokū*. Some, however, are recognized to have more influence with the deity than others; there are one or two of these *oholokū* in most villages. The most important are those who have obtained some object from the Urhonigbe shrine to put on their own altars. Women who desire children or whose children die in infancy seek the help of these priestesses and it is the latter who officiate at the installation of domestic *Olokū* shrines, a rite which involves the sacrifice of a goat, and dancing, during which the initiate frequently goes into a possession trance. Some of the *oholokū* hold annual ceremonies (*ugie*) which are attended by women who believe they have borne healthy children as a result of the priestess's intercession and by the children themselves.

Olokū is associated primarily with human fertility; he is "the bringer of children." This is consistent with the Edo conception of the universe. They envisage the land as being surrounded by water into which all the rivers flow. The path to *erivū* lies through or across this water and it is this way that human souls pass on their way to be born and after death. *Olokū* is worshipped, too, as the "god of wealth," an association which undoubtedly owes something to the coming of European trading ships across the sea.

Generally speaking *Olokū* is more clearly envisaged and more frequently worshipped than *Osanobua*. Some Edo speak of him as having surpassed his father, whose image, indeed, sometimes occupies a subsidiary place in *Olokū* shrines.

Ogū, "the god of iron" (or, more strictly, of metal), which the Edo have in common with the Yoruba, is worshipped especially by iron- and brass-smiths and—under the name *Ejag*—by warriors and specialist hunters. There is an *Ogū* altar in every forge where the smith makes offerings for success in producing metal objects. Hunters and warriors, too, have special *Ogū* shrines where they perform sacrifices before undertaking expeditions and on which they place the skulls of their victims. Apart from this, however, most pagan households have altars dedicated to *Ogū* and decorated with all kinds of scrap-iron objects; these are generally associated with the ancestor (*erha*) altar. Some individuals who are not smiths, hunters, or warriors are recognized as priests of *Ogū* with powers extending beyond their own households; their altars are installed by smith priests. They are believed to have more influence with the deity than other men and outsiders come to them with requests for special prayers and curses. A curse in the name of *Ogū* is believed to be particularly effective—non-Christians take oaths over metal objects in the courts—and the deity is believed to kill in a violent fashion. The appropriate sacrifices are dog, tortoise, snail, and palm-oil.

Osū is the "god of medicine," whose assistance must be sought to ensure the effective use of all "medicines," curative or otherwise. It is worshipped especially by the professional "doctors" (*ewaise*) in Benin City and elsewhere. The *ewaise*

wards of Benin City have an annual festival (*ekosū*) in honour of *Oṣū* during which all their medicines are believed to be strengthened. Some villages have community *Oṣū* shrines with recognized priests and so do some of the mutual-aid associations which have sprung up in recent years. Like *Olokū* and *Ogū*, however, *Oṣū* is also the object of domestic cults. Most household heads have their *Oṣū* shrines usually in a special room where their medicines are kept and some perform an annual rite (*ikua-ṣū*) at which new yam is offered to *Oṣū* and the individual medicines.

The worship of two other important deities, *Obiṣū* and *Ogīṣū*, now appears to have fallen into abeyance. Formerly there was a shrine to *Obiṣū* in Benin City to which the *Oba* appointed a priest. The deity appears to have been associated mainly with human fertility. *Ogīṣū* (literally "the king of death") was worshipped at a special shrine in the centre of Benin City by members of the *Oba*'s retinue known as *ukēbō*. It was believed that *Ogīṣū* came to take away people when it was time for them to die. Sacrifices were made to him—mainly, apparently, by the *Oba*—to induce him to delay. The main sacrifices were a man and a woman, a goat, a cow, and a ram or he-goat. In contrast with sacrifices to all other spirits and deities the victims were not eaten but simply allowed to rot away. *Ogīṣū* was believed to have a messenger *ofe* whose duty was to call the dead to *eriv* at the instance of his master. He is represented in brass images and wood and ivory carvings by a head with legs and arms growing out of it. According to some informants the *Oba* used to send out these images as a warning to people with whom he was displeased.

The Yoruba divining god, *Orṣmila* (*Ifa*) is widely worshipped. When members of the *Oba*'s lineage wish to acquire an *Orṣmila* shrine special palm-kernels from Ife are required; a store of these is kept at the palace.

SPIRITS OF THE DEPARTED

The word *eriv* which has already been referred to as the name of the spirit world is also used to denote the spirits of people who once lived in the world; its singular form is *eriv*, meaning "a corpse." It is necessary to distinguish between two kinds of *eriv*: (a) individual named ancestors with specific genealogical reference and (b) collective unnamed ancestors or predecessors of the members of a corporate group.

(a) It is the individual genealogically defined ancestors who are the object of the domestic ancestor cult. When a man dies his senior son, after performing the mortuary rites (see p. 50), sets up an altar in his honour, or, if the dead father was himself a senior son, adds carved staves to the existing altar. This altar (*aru-erha* from *aru*, altar and *erha*, father) consists of a mud-built platform on which are placed carved staves (*axurhe*) and one or more brass bells and, in the case of people of high rank, wooden or brass heads, ceremonial swords, and other objects. The senior son is the priest of his father (*erha*), interceding with him on behalf of all the latter's patrilineal descendants and, through him, with his lineal male ancestors as far back as he can remember. There is, however, a second priest, ideally the senior surviving brother of the deceased, who must be present at all important sacrifices and prayers to represent himself and his descendants in the male line, his brothers and their descendants, and his sisters. It will be noted that, in accordance with the rule of primogeniture, and since ideally every man should have a senior son, there is a likelihood of fission of the ancestor-worshipping group in each generation. The effective ancestor-worshipping unit, therefore, including the youngest children and the surviving brothers and sisters of the *erha*, is from two to four generations in depth, though more remote collaterals may be present at sacrifices and prayers may be made for them.

The dead father is conceived of as standing in much the same relation to his descendants and their dependents as does the head of an extended family in this world. He punishes such offences as incest, the adultery of wives, quarrelling and stealing within the group, bringing sickness and even death upon the offender and

his close kin. Members suspected of wrongdoing are frequently asked to take oaths upon *erha* to prove their truthfulness. Offerings including kola, palm-wine, chalk, and pounded yam are made regularly and are accompanied by prayers for the welfare of members of the family. In times of sickness and other catastrophes goats and fowls are sacrificed. Finally there is an annual festival (*eko*) at which all the patrilineal descendants of *erha* and his father, and their wives, kneel one-by-one before the altar, present kola-nuts and other offerings and pray for the well-being of themselves and their husbands, wives, and children. Married daughters return home to take part in *eko*. Patrilineal collaterals and other cognates may be present but they do not kneel before the altar. The kola-nuts are divided between the worshippers who break off small pieces and scatter them on the altar while praying for themselves. The senior son of *erha* then sacrifices a goat (or a cow if his wealth and rank justify it) and a cock which are cooked and eaten the following day.

Where there is a hereditary title (and succession to such titles is by primogeniture) the previous owners of the title are worshipped separately, though frequently at the same shrine as the *erha* of the living title-holder. Ideally they should be identical with the latter's lineal ancestors but, in fact, as a consequence of deviation from the rule of succession the two sets of names may show differences. The worship of past title-holders frequently has significance beyond the chief's lineage. Offerings to past village-chiefs are made, for example, during the promotion of individuals to the senior age-grade. In some cases, too, the founder of a political unit—a village, for example, or a ward of Benin City—is worshipped separately. Thus, in the brass-smith's ward of Benin City the hereditary chief, *Ise*, makes sacrifices to the founder of the ward, on behalf of all its members, on the day that he holds his *eko* in honour of his own father. His co-worshippers before the founder's shrine—i.e., those who actually make offerings—are the title-holders and the *adiwere* of the ward rather than his closest agnates.

In the same way the ancestors of the *Oba* have significance for the whole nation. In the past all the famous *Oba* of the past had separate altars, each housed in a large walled compound. In 1897 there were about 15 of these compounds (*ugba*) but to-day there is only one which contains separate altars for the last three *Oba* and a collective one for the rest; outside the palace courtyard there are separate altars for three famous warrior kings of the past. In the past there were two separate annual series of rites (*ugioro* and *ugigũ*) at which sacrifices to individual *Oba* were performed on every fifth day. Each series was brought to a close with a public festival in honour of the reigning *Oba*'s own father (*ugie-erhoba*) at which 12 human beings, chosen from the prison (*twedo*) in Benin City where the worst criminals were confined, were sacrificed. After the *ugie-erhoba* which terminated *ugigũ* the *Iyase* performed his *eko*, then all other *eko* rites had to be completed within seven days. To-day *ugioro* and *ugigũ* are no longer performed but regular sacrifices are still made at the shrines of the last three *Oba*.

The actual rites in honour of the past *Oba* are directed by special priests from the group known as *Ihogbe* who also officiate at the annual sacrifices to the reigning *Oba*'s own head (see below). The *Ihogbe*, whose ancestors are believed to have followed *Araminya* from Ife, are known as "the *Oba*'s family," in virtue of their function as royal ancestor priests, though no genealogical connection is in fact traced. They are divided into two local groups in Benin City, headed by chiefs *Ihama* and *Esaxurke* who are the senior priests. They and the other *Ihogbe* title-holders are the only people who are allowed to stand on the dais where the *Oba* and his wives and children sit during state ceremonies.

In some households, particularly those of people of high rank, there is an altar to the mothers of the living and past household heads, decorated with *axurke* and wooden images of fowls. Separate shrines are erected to the mothers of the *Oba* in the village, *Uselu*, where they have their court.

(b) The collective ancestors or predecessors of a group are known as *edi3*, which, it will be noted, is the name of the senior age-grade in Benin villages. The *edi3* spirits are thought of both as the original occupiers of the village land and as all the *edi3* who have since lived and been buried there. All villages have *edi3* shrines (*ɔgwedi3*) which contain an altar decorated with *uxerhe*; some are large buildings in which meetings of the village council are held. The *ɔdi3were*, as the priest of the *edi3*, makes regular offerings there, and his influence with the *edi3* spirits is a powerful sanction, particularly with reference to his control of the age-grades. Promotions through the latter are made in the *ɔgwedi3* and the *ɔdi3were* himself is invested there.

The earth (*oti*) is worshipped in close association with the *edi3* spirits with the *ɔdi3were* as priest. It is conceived as the ground in which the founders and elders are buried rather than as a fertility spirit.

The concept *edi3* is not, however, confined to the collective ancestors of a village community. In some villages each ward has its own *ɔgwedi3*. The family and household has its *edi3* too, for whom a cow or goat is sacrificed during mortuary rites and to whom libations of palm-wine and pieces of kola-nut are often offered. In most community shrines of hero and other deities there are subsidiary altars to the *edi3*, that is to the past worshippers of the deity. The palace associations, too, have their *edi3* altars at which offerings are made regularly, at promotions and the investiture of new title-holders, etc. The *Uzama* have their *edi3* altar housed in the compound of their leader, *Olika*. Finally there are the *edi3* of the whole Benin nation (*edi3-Edo*), represented by a carved staff which is in the keeping of the *Esagba*, the second-ranking *Eghavuo n'Ore* who is also known as *ɔdi3were-Edo*; sacrifices are made to *edi3-Edo* in times of national catastrophe.

HERO-DEITIES

The hero-deities are mythical or semi-mythical figures of the past most of whom are believed to have turned themselves into natural features, especially rivers and ponds. Some are male, some female, and one was a dog belonging to *Oba Ewuare*. Several of the more important ones are believed to have been men of exceptional magical powers who lived in the time of *Ewuare*.

The rites associated with the various cults differ considerably and it is impossible to summarize them here. They have, however, for the most part, certain features in common. The worshipping group is usually village-wide, though in most cases the same deity is worshipped by different villages which may be scattered or contiguous; there is occasionally some co-operation between villages in the sense that the priests or other representatives from one village will visit another village with the same cult when a festival (*ugie*) is in progress. In most of the cults there is a division of ritual labour between the sexes and there are often rites which are kept secret from women. The male worshippers are themselves frequently graded and the higher grades possess secrets hidden from the members of the lower. There are commonly two priests of the cult in each village; succession to these offices may be hereditary (in which case the priest is frequently the village chief) or by seniority or possession. Each village has a cult festival either annually or at less frequent intervals in which there is public dancing and special sacrifices accompanied by prayers and curses. The *Oba* maintains some measure of control over all the cults in that he should be informed when an *ugie* is going to be performed and he may send offerings and regalia to be used by the worshippers. Except in one or two cases where worshippers visit the palace all these cults are banned from Benin City itself.

One of the most widespread hero-deity cults is that associated with *Ovia*, the mythical wife of a king who melted into a river out of grief at being accused by her co-wives of bringing sickness upon her husband. *Ovia* is the name of the largest river in the Benin kingdom though many of the villages practising the cult have no particular connection with it.

Some of the *Ovia*-worshipping villages perform an *ugie* every year, others much less regularly. At this time most of the men in the village go into seclusion in the groves around the *Ovia* shrine for periods varying from a week to two or three months. Every second day they emerge, completely masked except for their feet, to dance. These masked figures are known as *Erivul-Ovia*; that is, they represent the spirits of past worshippers of *Ovia* and each impersonates his most lately-deceased patrilineal ancestor. The first dance is held before the shrine of the *Ovia* spirits, the second and third in front of the houses of the two *Ovia* priests and the rest for the village as a whole or in other villages to which they have been invited. After the dance the masked figures go from house to house receiving small gifts; the spectators take the opportunity of securing their assistance in making prayers for children, health, and prosperity, and in cursing their enemies; a curse laid during the *ugie* is said to be incapable of revocation until the next *ugie* is being performed.

The male worshippers are graded along lines similar to those of the village age-grades though the personnel of the corresponding secular and ritual grades is not necessarily identical. Except on two occasions all women are barred from the *Ovia* groves; their duty is to keep the men well fed and to sing night and morning for their safety, for they are believed to be on the threshold between *agb5* and *Erivul* and, therefore, in great ritual danger. It is the women who finally "kill off" the *Erivul* by throwing cloths over their heads, thus ensuring the return of the men to the real world. After this they are taken to the groves where they are made to underline curses upon those who seek to harm members of the village by physical or supernatural means, on women who seek to harm their husbands, etc. The festival is brought to an end by a rite of reconciliation between the sexes.

The symbolism and the content of the prayers and curses spoken during the festival might be held to have reference mainly to three categories of social relations.

1. It expresses the solidarity of the village as a whole as against other villages and against individuals within it and outside who seek to harm its members. Much care is taken to make the public ceremonies as attractive as possible so that the fame of the village will be spread abroad. The period of the festival is thought of as one in which all enmities and ill-will are dispersed or made ineffective—all quarrelling at this time is a great sin—and as an opportunity for individuals to acquire supernatural benefits.

2. It expresses the dichotomy between the sexes; a great many of the rites are kept secret from women, the men use a secret language which the women do not understand, and there is a total ban on sexual intercourse. At the same time it underlines the necessity for co-operation between the sexes for the perpetuation of the group by the production and successful upbringing of "good" children.

3. It reinforces the authority of the old men over the young. Again secrecy plays an important role and, in a period which is believed to be fraught with ritual dangers, the young men are reluctant to quarrel with or disobey their elders.

Ovia-worship is not, however, confined to the periodic *ugie*. Every fifth day the priests go to the shrine to make offerings. Individuals go to them with requests that they make special prayers and, in particular, women who desire children seek their aid in making offerings to *Ovia* with promises to provide further sacrifices if their prayers meet with success.

PERSONAL SPIRITS AND SUPERNATURAL POWERS

Under this heading certain spirits or powers associated with individuals are dealt with. Three of these are particularly important.

1. *Eh*. Every individual is thought of as consisting of two parts, the living "person" in this world and the spiritual counterpart *ehi* which is in *erivul*; some informants say that the two alternate at each incarnation. According to the common belief when a person is going to be born in *agb5* he goes before *Osanobua* (or *Olokū*) tells him what he plans to do with his life on earth and requests the material and

spiritual facilities for accomplishing this; this act is expressed in the infinitive "hi." If a man is unsuccessful in the world he is said to have done this badly or to be fighting against the fate which he has determined for himself and when people are being buried the mourners call after them to "hi" well next time. *Ehi's* task is to stand behind his counterpart when the latter is making his request to the creator and to ensure that his counterpart does not forget anything. Unsuccessful individuals sometimes make offerings to their *chi* to secure its intercession with the creator. The *Oba's chi* is of particular significance. On state occasions he wears an image of his *chi*, in the form of a beaded doll, at his waist and the title *Ehioba* is held by a male chief and by one of his wives. In state rituals these individuals (and others who represent other parts of the *Oba's* body, etc., see p. 39 above) are anointed with the blood of sacrifices and rubbed with medicines in the same way as the king himself; in the past they were killed when the *Oba* died.

2. *Ukhuu*—the head. The head, which is recognized to be the seat of judgment and will as well as of most of the senses, is associated with a person's "luck". A man is spoken of as having "a good head" or "a bad head" according to his fortunes in life. Sacrifices and offerings are accordingly made to the head, particularly after a piece of good fortune such as the birth of a healthy child, the winning of a court case, or a safe return from the *Ovia* bush. Special sacrifices to the head (*igwe*) are made annually to celebrate the successful completion of one year and the beginning of another; this is supposed to be a time of rejoicing. The *Oba's igwe* is the occasion of one of the major public state rituals, the only one which is still regularly carried out. Formerly this was an occasion for human sacrifices but to-day cows, goats, and other animals are used. During the same ceremony the *Oba* is rubbed with medicines prepared by the group of priests known as *ogiefa* to strengthen him for the coming year.

The *Oba* and other people of high rank have altars dedicated to their heads.

3. *Obo*—the arm. The arm is recognized to be the seat of the power of accomplishing things (*efi*); its worship is particularly characteristic of warriors but is also practised by other wealthy and high-ranking people. The *Oba* and other people of high rank have special altars of the hand (*ikigobo*) which take the form of sculptured cylindrical objects in wood, or, occasionally, brass. The *obo* was formerly worshipped before and after special undertakings to ensure and give thanks for success.

Some difficulty arises in determining what, in the case of *ukhuu* and *obo*, is the actual object of worship. In practice the Edo act as though making offerings to their actual heads and arms though when questioned more closely some informants will aver that the actual entities "served" are in *erofu*, the spirit world.

OTHER STATE RITUALS

Before the coming of British rule there were many annual state rituals most of which are no longer performed. The sacrifices to the royal ancestors and to the *Oba's* head have already been mentioned. Among the more important of the others were:—

1. *Isiokuo*—a war ritual in honour of the god of iron (*Ogū*). It involved a procession of warriors through Benin City, an acrobatic dance by men suspended from trees which recalled a mythical war against "the sky," and human and other sacrifices.

2. *Agwe*—a ceremony in which offerings of new yam were made at all the altars in the palace. This was the occasion for a masquerade called *ododua* in which the performers wore bronze masks. *Agwe* was followed by *ihua*, the offering of new yams at all the altars in individual households.

3. *Eghute*—a series of rites designed to protect pregnant women and to ensure successful birth for the whole nation. The women were all sent out of Benin City

and the priest *Osuā* and others masqueraded as pregnant women. A rite known as *ububā* was performed by *Osuā* in which a man was pinned to a stool by a stake driven through the top of his head. This took place in every alternate year.

4. *Ixurke*—a rite to ensure the fertility of the land (*otse*) performed by the *ogiefa* priests.

5. *Ugie-ivie*—a ceremony in which the *Oba's* beads (*ivie*) and other regalia were laid out in the shrine of *Oba Ewuare* by the *Iwebo* and a human being sacrificed over them.

6. *Ugie-ewere*. In the morning just before dawn children take burning brands from the fire and chase all evil things out of Benin City to the junction of roads leading out of the town. They then gather "leaves of joy" (*eb-ewere*) which on their return they present to their parents and other adults. In the evening the *Ihogbe* (priests of the past kings) present similar leaves to the *Oba*.

Of these only the last is regularly performed; it takes place as part of the new year (*igwe*) rites on the sixth day after the sacrifices to the *Oba's* head.

There are certain other state gods not all of which can be mentioned here. Among them are *Unwe* and *Ora* whose priests are respectively the chiefs *Osuā* and *Osa*. Before 1897 the *Oba* used to send one human being to each of these gods for sacrifice after which the priests made a show of sucking the blood from their severed heads; these sacrifices may have been connected with *isiokuo*. The god *Azama* has as its priest the *Uzama*, *Olaf*; its worship was connected with the well-being of the *Oba's* children.

In the old days human beings were "crucified" on special trees as a measure to hasten the beginning or the end of the rains.

MAGIC

All magical practitioners can be subsumed under the rubric *obo* (pl. *ebo*), usually translated "doctor." Though all heads of extended families and many other individuals possess magical skills to some degree the name *ebo* is generally reserved for those who are believed to be especially proficient. These are usually specialists in some branch of magical activities such as curing, divining, combating witches, administering ordeals, etc., though most practise a number or all of these arts.

The "curing doctor" (*ob-odf*) prepares medicines which are given to the patient to drink, rubbed on his body or inserted in talismans which he carries on his person. Among them may be classed the *uxegie*, professional bone-setters who come from a particular ward in Benin City.

The "witch-doctor" (*obo náy'ada*—"doctor who goes to the road-junction", i.e., where sacrifices to witches are made) possesses certain "medicines" and implements which enable him to recognize and combat witchcraft. His aid is sought in making sacrifices to the witches to persuade them to desist from their evil-doing.

The ordeals administered by *ob-itā* are of various kinds. They include the picking of cowries or seeds out of boiling palm-oil; the insertion of a feather through the tongue which, if the suspected person is innocent, should be easy to withdraw; and the drinking of sasswood. The last was administered only upon the *Oba's* orders by the members of a certain ward in Benin City. All these methods have now been abandoned.

There are several kinds of divining each with its own practitioners. The most common is *ogwega*, the interpretation of patterns into which four strings of four shells, each with a concave and a convex side, fall. Many individuals in all villages can divine by this method but when an important decision is at stake the tendency is to seek out a diviner at a considerable distance from one's home. The *ewema* diviner works by casting a number of small figures of human beings, animals, and inanimate objects on to a platter, interpreting the answer according to the pattern in which they fall. This method is practised especially by the *ewaise* who inhabit

a number of wards in Benin City. They are among the *Oba's* official "doctors" and are skilful in preparing and administering curative medicines and in making charms. Other diviners use the Yoruba method of divining with palm-kernels and *Olokū* priests practise divining with cowries and by the *akpèlè* method which is similar to *ewáwá*.

"Medicine" can be used to harm others as well as to cure and protect oneself and one's patients. A person who has a reputation for harmful medicines is known as *ob-erhiá*, "spoiling doctor."

Certain "strong" doctors are credited with abnormal powers and special medicines which permit them to fly through the air, to transform themselves into animals or to disappear when in danger.

WITCHCRAFT

The Edo concept of witchcraft is well defined. A witch (*azē*) is any person who has the ability to detach his or her "life-essence" (*orhiā*) from the body for the purpose of capturing and killing the *orhiā* of another; the witch's *orhiā* is generally said to turn into an owl and the victim's is transformed into a goat or antelope or some other animal that is easy to kill. Any person of any age or of either sex can be a witch but female witches are believed to be the stronger and accusations are, in fact, more commonly made against women.

Witches are believed to kill because they are under an obligation to the other witches to provide food, in their turn. Their status in the secret meeting of witches (*oro*) is believed to depend on the number of victims they have killed. The witches are said to be organized along lines parallel to the territorial divisions of the Benin kingdom. Each village has its tree in which the witches of the village are said to meet at night. There are larger meetings for the more powerful witches of the major geographical areas of the kingdom and finally a central meeting which is attended only by the most powerful witches from the Benin kingdom and outside. The precise locations of all these supposed meetings are well known.

Witchcraft is frequently said to be inherited. Closer questioning, however, reveals a belief that a pregnant witch may give witchcraft food to the child she is carrying; the child of a witch is, therefore, more likely to be suspected than others. New witches can be recruited by putting the same substance, which is invisible, into a person's food. All witches are believed to have full knowledge of their powers and the ability to recognize their fellows and to communicate with them without others hearing or understanding what they are saying.

It seems to be generally accepted that witches can kill only at close quarters. The Edo say that witches usually attack their own and their co-wives' children before attempting to kill other people; this is because they know more about them and therefore risk less harm to themselves. They recognize, too, the likelihood of jealousy and conflicts between co-wives and the internal conflict of loyalty in a woman who is the mother of a senior son and who may be suspected of seeking to harm her husband so that her son may inherit. In practice, however, accusations along these lines seem rarely to occur. Most recorded instances of witchcraft accusations involved people who were not close kinsmen. Where the situation seemed ripe for the ideal kind of accusation there was a tendency to shift the blame for the actual witchcraft aggression over to some unknown or unnamed witch. The relative on whom the accusation might have been expected to fall was regarded as having disturbed the unity of the kin-group, thus making it vulnerable to witchcraft attack.

Witches are propitiated by sacrifices and offerings, usually placed at road junctions. It is the duty of a village headman to defend the community by establishing good relations with the body of witches associated with the village.

II. THE ISHAN CHIEFDOMS AND TRIBES

LOCATION, NOMENCLATURE, AND LANGUAGE

The chiefdoms, tribes, and independent villages which make up the Ishan section of the Edo-speaking peoples are located to the north-east of the Benin kingdom. With the exception of the Anwain tribe and the independent village of Ujagbe,¹ they are contained within the boundaries of the Ishan Division of Benin Province, and are bounded on the north-west and north by the Iybiosakon and Etsako sections of the Northern Edo, on the west and south-west by the Benin kingdom, on the south and south-east by the Western Ibo, and on the east by the River Niger and the Igala people. There is some linguistic and cultural overlapping on each of these frontiers.²

The word "Ishan" is a corruption of *esā*, which is said to be derived from *esāfua*, meaning "those who fled." Many of the Ishan communities and immigrant elements within them claim to have been founded by people who left the Benin kingdom to evade justice or escape oppression.

The Ishan people are distinguishable in their name, language, and in certain cultural and social characteristics, from neighbouring sections of the Edo-speaking peoples. They speak a series of closely-related dialects, not far removed from the language of the Benin kingdom, which shade off into Edo, Etsako, and Iybiosakon dialects on the borders with these groups and probably show some Ibo and Igala influence in the east and south.

With few exceptions the Ishan communities are very uniform in social structure and especially in their political framework, which is, however, similar to that of many chiefdoms particularly in the eastern part of the Benin kingdom. On the other hand, in its emphasis on hereditary chieftainship and individual titles and in the general absence of title associations Ishan contrasts markedly with the Northern Edo peoples (described in Section III, pp. 81-126).

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

All the Ishan communities live in the area of the Ishan Plateau whose general level is over 400 ft. The plateau rises from the Orhiomo River in the south-west to an east-west ridge along the northern borders of Ishan Division on which are situated the chiefdoms of Irua and Ekpoma. Egoro, Ukhun, Idua, and Ewu lie on the northern slopes of this ridge, which is drained by small streams flowing north then east to the Niger. Ujagbe is on a spur projecting to the north.

The largest chiefdom, Uromi, occupies a high ridge in the centre of the plateau from which the land falls gradually away to the south-east and east. These slopes are drained by the Orle, Orbu, and Uto Rivers which flow to the Niger. Okpoji, Igueben, and Ugbejun lie on the undulating surface of the plateau whose height decreases to the south-west to the level of the Orhiomo River and its tributaries.

¹ In the Kukuruku Division.

² The villages of Idua and Ujagbe and the small chiefdom of Ukhun in the north are reported to have historical and cultural connections with the Iybiosakon people. Urohi, in the west, has close connections with its neighbours in the Benin kingdom; its people regard themselves as Edo rather than Ishan and, like Igueben, speak a dialect which is probably closer to Edo than to the other Ishan dialects. In the south-east Ebu (in Asaba Division) and Inyelen (now a part of Urho chiefdom) have sometimes been reported as Ishan communities. They claim, for the most part, Edo and Ishan origins but speak a dialect of Igala with an admixture of Edo vocabulary. Their social organisation exhibits Ibo and Igala characteristics but most of their cults are clearly of Edo origin. In the Urho chiefdom Ishan and Igala communities live side by side, each retaining its own culture and social organization; most of the people speak both Ishan and Igala. Igala is spoken as a second language in Urowa and Ugboba chiefdoms.

The Orhionmo flows south-west to join the Benin River. All the southern slopes of the plateau are considerably broken up by deeply entrenched streams.

The natural vegetation of most of the area is high tropical forest with an abundance of good timber. There are areas of orchard bush in the north-eastern part of Ukhun, in Ujagbe, Northern Uzia, Egoronokhua, and the adjoining south-western part of Ekpoma, and patches of orchard bush and elephant grass on the surface of the plateau, especially in the more densely populated areas where the forest cover has been removed. The eastern, south-eastern, and south-western sectors, where the population density is low, are heavily forested. Oil-palms grow abundantly on the higher parts of the plateau but are said to be deficient in the east and south-east.

The surface rocks of the area are porous Benin Sands and there is a very low water-table, especially in the higher regions. The Ishan build away from the widely-spaced streams and many villages have to carry water several miles. Pits are dug to collect water in the rainy season but these supplies do not generally last throughout the dry half of the year.

DEMOGRAPHY

The area of the Ishan Division (i.e., excluding Anwain and Ujagbe) is 1,162 square miles. Its population, according to the 1952 Census, is 192,194, of whom 183,149 are described as "Edo"; this figure presumably includes the Ishan people and Edo and Northern Edo peoples living in Ishan, but not Urhobo and Isoko. Of the other strangers the largest groups are Ibo, 4,717 (including 1,578 Kwale Ibo mainly engaged in the production and marketing of palm-oil and kernels), Urhobo-Isoko, 880 (similarly engaged), and Yoruba, 762.

The overall population density is 165 per square mile but the population is very unevenly distributed. The highest densities are found in the northern, central, and south-eastern parts of the area. Uromi has 621 persons per square mile, Irua 374, and Ekpoma, Ewu, Ugbegun, Igbeben, and the Ewohimi group of chiefdoms 200 or more. Okpoji, Ubiaja, and Ekpon have between 100 and 150 persons per square mile and the remaining communities less.² The swampy and heavily forested areas in the eastern and south-western sectors are most sparsely inhabited.

The Ishan people live in compact settlements built in clearings in the forest and bush, away from the streams. Formerly the houses, which are of mud with wooden door and window-frames and leaf or palm-mat roofs, were clustered round one or more open spaces (*ughele*) which contain shrines, meeting-houses, etc. To-day there is usually a village street with houses built along one or both sides. It is not clear how old this form of settlement is but it has undoubtedly been encouraged by the building of roads through the area; there is a general tendency towards ribbon development along the roads.

The houses are similar in pattern to those found in Benin villages. New imported materials—cement and corrugated sheets—are now being used and the wealthier people are building two-storey houses in some settlements.

MAIN FEATURES OF ECONOMY

There is little to distinguish the economy of Ishan from that of the Benin kingdom. The great majority of the population is engaged in agriculture, mainly for subsistence. The food crops do not differ greatly from those common to the Benin kingdom but cotton is grown much more extensively, especially in the higher regions.

The area exports surplus food to Sapele, Benin, Warri, and towns farther afield. Farm and palm products are sold in the local markets and at the trading

² Individual figures for the chiefdoms of the South-West Federation are not available but their overall density is 89.

stations on the Niger, the most considerable of which is Illushi, an evacuation point for much produce from Ishan and Southern Kukuruku. Most villages of any size have markets every four days and the larger ones—Uromi, for example—are visited by traders from considerable distances who hire lorries for the purpose. Ebele, an important market at the junction of many roads, is said to have been founded, in the first place, as a market for chiefs' wives only. The markets deal in imported cloth, petty articles, cigarettes, kerosene, etc., which are travelling in the opposite direction for consumption in Ishan.

Of the cash crops introduced since the British conquest rubber is the most important. As in Benin it is grown both on a peasant basis and in plantations of considerable size and is sold either to middlemen or directly to the agents of exporting firms. Timber is extracted by European companies and independent African operators who employ local and immigrant, largely Ibo, labour.

Hunting and, where possible, fishing are subsidiary economic pursuits. Amara, a fishing and trading village on Alagbetta Creek which was founded from Ughoha, has a considerable trade in dried fish which is transported as far as Ewu and Agbor on the bicycles of Ibo traders.

There are a few herds of dwarf cattle which graze on grassy patches in and around settlements. Fowls, goats, and sheep are ubiquitous.

The principal crafts are weaving and smithing. Women weave cloth on very simple upright broad looms, using both local and European thread. A large quantity of cloth finds its way out of the Ishan area for consumption. Most communities have iron-smiths who generally trace their origins either to the smiths' ward of Benin City or to the Ineme people of Kukuruku. Igueben is notable for having supplied the *Oba* of Benin with the ceremonial swords, *ada* and *ebé*; its *onogie* has the title *Okaigü*, "leader of the smiths".

There is some wood-carving by part-time specialists who produce ritual objects for the decoration of shrines and the houses of chiefs. The house of the *Onogie* of Uromi, for example, has a number of carved pillars. Carpentry has become more important with the introduction of wooden window-frames and other components of modern house-building.

TRADITIONS OF ORIGIN AND HISTORY

ORIGINS

There are a few references in Ishan tradition to aboriginal peoples who lived in the area before the migrations which resulted in the founding of the present-day communities. Some elements in the population of Egoro, Okpoji, Ewu, Uromi, and Ewohimi claim to be descended from ancestors who "dropped from the sky" or who emerged from the ground or from rivers. Ewu traditions, for example, tell of an ancestor who fell from the sky and was conquered by the *Oba* of Benin who gave him a wife and followers and sent him back with the title *onogie*.

Most traditions, however, are concerned with the origins and growth of the chiefdoms, villages, and village-groups that claim to have been founded directly or indirectly from Benin or by natives of other areas (especially Ife and Heku Island) who were absorbed, peacefully or by conquest, into the Benin empire. Emigrants from Benin are said to have fled from justice or oppression though a few *enigie* were apparently deliberately placed by the *Oba* to look after shrines or to guard his interests in the area. Among these latter were the first *Onogie* of Urohi and *Okaigü* of Igueben. Some of the chiefdoms were undoubtedly offshoots of others already established and their *enigie* did not, perhaps, in all cases, secure the *Oba's* recognition.

It is impossible to date satisfactorily the founding of the chiefdoms though the traditions of Igueben and Urohi say that they were founded by warriors who followed the *Oba* to the war against the *Ata* of Idah, presumably the one which is

said to have taken place early in the 16th century (see Section I, p. 20). The 26 chiefdoms for which information is available can recall the names of from six to 16 *enigie*, with the exception of Igueben which names 26 *ekaigb*. Sixteen chiefdoms list a succession of between 12 and 16 *enigie* but in a number of cases the lists are said to be incomplete, some names having been forgotten.

All the chiefdoms appear to have grown by the addition of immigrants of widely diverse Edo-speaking and non-Edo origins, who accepted the authority of the *onogie* in whose territory they settled. The result is that nearly all the chiefdoms are of very heterogeneous composition. Most of the people claim descent from people who emigrated from the Benin kingdom for widely varying reasons. They included warriors who did not return to Benin after fighting campaigns (e.g., against Idah and Uzia); relatives of the *Oba* and others who offended him; individuals placed by the *Oba* to guard shrines; craft, trading, and ritual specialists who came to seek their fortunes or were invited by the *enigie*; slaves or servants sent down to farm for chiefs in Benin who were responsible to the *Oba* for the administration of Ishan, etc. The *enigie* often encouraged settlers by giving them titles and other honours and privileges. Within Ishan itself there was much migration from chiefdom to chiefdom and many shifts of allegiance from one *onogie* to another.

SUBSEQUENT EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL RELATIONS

The greater part of Ishan apparently remained within the Benin empire down to the British conquest though there were periodical defections and reconquests in which some of the Ishan chiefdoms sided with Benin against others. The *Oba* Ozolua who was reigning in 1485 is said to have been killed in a war with Uzia but it is not clear whether this was a war of conquest or the suppression of a revolt. Some *enigie* provided warriors for the Benin armies, as for instance in the war which brought Akure (Ondo Province) back under the *Oba*'s rule in the early part of the last century. On at least one occasion in the last century chiefdoms took opposing sides in a war of succession to the Benin kingship.

Internally the history of Ishan is one of wars and alliances between chiefdoms. Ubijaja is said to have dominated much of eastern Ishan during the 19th century. Warfare was carried on, in addition, against neighbouring non-Ishan peoples; Egoro, for example, fought Ozala, an Ivbiosakon tribe.

NUPE CONTACTS AND THE MODERN PERIOD

The Nupe who, during the latter half of the last century, gained control over most of what is now Kukuru Division raided the northern borders of Ishan but did not penetrate deeply into the forest. Ujagbe, Ewu, Ukhun, and Irua were most affected and it is reported that raids were made as far as Ugboha. Ewu land is said originally to have stretched to the Igedion River north of the present site of Agbede. Its boundaries were pushed south to the foot of the Ishan Plateau by the Nupe and the *Oba* of Agbede whom they supported, but in the forest country the Ewu people defended themselves successfully; some, however, fled to Uromi where their descendants remain. Ujagbe, which was formerly under the *Onogie* of Ewu, came under the influence of the *Oba* of Agbede about 1895 and the people are now virtually all Muslims. Emando Village, Ekpoma, is said to have been founded by a small band of marauders from the north whom the *Onogie* of Ekpoma employed as mercenaries; they continued to pay tribute of palm-oil, goats, and cowries to Bida. Traces of Nupe influence remain in the spread of Islam, particularly to Ewu and Irua, and the adoption by the men of northern styles of dress.

Europeans began to visit Ishan in the years immediately following the Benin Expedition of 1897 but the area was not finally brought under control until a military force was sent against Uromi and the Uniya and Edenu village-groups of Irua in the spring of 1901. Uromi was defeated only after hard fighting.

LIST OF CHIEFDOMS, VILLAGES AND VILLAGE GROUPS

<i>Present-day Administrative Designation</i>	<i>Chiefdom,* Village or Village group</i>	<i>Number of † villages</i>	<i>Total population 1952</i>	<i>Approx. area sq. m.</i>	<i>Approx. pop. density sq. m.</i>
Ivire-Uda-Esaba Federation	1. Ekpoma (<i>Ek'oma</i>) Ch.	16	22,193	110	202
	2. Egoro (<i>Egkolo</i>) Ch.	6	2,536	40	63
	3. Okpoji (<i>Ukpaji</i>) Ch.	7	3,915	30	131
	4. Urochi (<i>U'ro</i>) Ch.	6	2,335	30-40	60-80
	5. Ukhun (<i>U'ā</i>) Ch.	1	877	10	80
	6. Idua (<i>Idoa</i>) V.	1	783	11	71
Irua N.A.	7. Irua (<i>U'rua</i>) Ch.	20	18,685	50	374
Ewu N.A.	8. Ewu (<i>Ēiwa</i>) Ch.	7	9,074	36	252
Etsako Dt. (Kukuruku Div.)	9. Ujagbe V.	1	2,129		
	10. Anwain	4	2,324	100	
Uromi-Uzia N.A.	11. Uzia (<i>U'zsa</i>) V.G.	7	2,997	70	43
	12. Uromi (<i>U'rkwa</i>) Ch.	19	40,234	60	621
North-East Federation †	13. Ubiaja † (<i>U'biaa</i>) Ch.	13-16	9,896	110	94
	14. Udo (<i>U'do</i>) Ch.		411		
	15. Oria (<i>O'ria</i>) Ch.	4	1,101		
	16. Onogolo (<i>Onogkolo</i>) Ch.	2	218		
	17. Ilushi or Ozigolo (<i>O'zigolo</i>) Ifoku Is. V.G.		5,383		
	18. Ugboba (<i>O'wba</i>) Ch.	7	3,003	96	31
South-West Federation	19. Ebele (<i>E'bele</i>) Ch.	8	5,238	100	89
	20. Ogwa (<i>O'gwa</i>) Ch.	4	3,095		
	21. Amaho (<i>A'ma'ho</i>) Ch.	4	2,569		
	22. Ugun (<i>U'gū</i>) Ch.	2	1,036		
	23. Ujogba (<i>U'jagba</i>) Ch.	6	2,269		
Igueben N.A.	24. Igueben (<i>I'gu'ibē</i>) Ch.	8	9,801	42 *	233
Ugbegun N.A.	25. Ugbegun (<i>U'gbegū</i>) Ch.	7	6,394	32	209
South-East Federation	26. Ema (<i>E'ma</i>) Ch.	5	4,354	60	73
	27. Obodua (<i>O'ba'dua</i>) Ch.	10	4,768	60	79
	28. Okhuesan (<i>O'kwa'sā</i>) Ch.	4	2,166	28	77
	29. Urowa (<i>O'rowa</i>) Ch.	1	759	35	22
	30. Urho (<i>U'rho</i>) Ch.	8	1,702		
Ekpon N.A.	31. Ekpon (<i>E'kpō</i>) Ch.	5	3,747	25-30	125-150
Ewohimi Federation	32. Ewohimi (<i>E'wo'istē</i> or <i>O'ristē</i>) Ch.	7	15,432	100	229
	33. Ewatto (<i>E'wato</i>) Ch.	4	4,204		
	34. Ewosa (<i>E'wosa</i>) Ch.	3	3,292		
Total			199,020		

* The phonetic spellings in parentheses are taken from the speech of Dr. Okojie, a native of Irua and Ugboba. In the text the spellings most commonly employed, with some modifications, are used.

† This column is based on the names of villages given in Administrative Reports and does not include temporary or recent "camps" distinguishable by the prefixes *aho* or *aga*, which may or may not have the social organization and social status of villages. The numbers of villages do not coincide with those given in the 1952 Census report where the term village is apparently not used in the same sense or consistently. In any case it is probable that the same criteria for distinguishing villages from wards on the one hand and village groups on the other have not been used in all our sources.

* Some villages have been variously reported as being in Ubiaja and Udo chiefdoms. Combined figures for area and population density are given here.

For footnotes 7 and 8 see overleaf.

NOTES ON INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITIES*

1. The founder of Ekpoma came from Ifeku Island and later visited Ife and Benin. His grandson secured the title *Onogie* from the *Oba*. Later immigrants from the Benin kingdom, Agbor (Asaba Division), Kukuruku, other Ishan communities.

2. The first *Onogie* came from Benin with the founder of Ekpoma. Two villages are descended from aboriginals, another was founded by a man from Ekpoma.

3. Founded at the same time as Ekpoma and Egoro. Aboriginals and immigrants from Benin and Ekpon.

4. Founded by a Benin warrior returning from the war against Idah. Later immigrations from the Benin Kingdom.

5. The founder of Ukhun came from Benin via what is now Ekpoma, married a wife from Uzeba (Ivbiosakon). Social organization suggests affinities with Ivbiosakon.

6. Founder a son of mythical founder of Ivi-Ada-Obi group, Ivbiosakon. Another version makes him a half-brother (same mother) of founders of Ukhun and Era (Ivbiosakon).

7. Traditions tell of an original migration from Ife to Ifeku Island before the founder visited Benin married *Oba's* daughter and acquired title *Onogie*. Immigrants from Agbede and Otwa (Kukuruku) and Uromi and Ifeku (Ishan).

8. Founder "descended from the sky," was conquered by the *Oba*, made *Onogie*. Immigrants from Benin kingdom, Ora (Ivbiosakon) and Ekpoma.

9. An original connection with Ora and Urole (Ivbiosakon). The people fled to Ewu, were given land by *Onogie*, later seceded, came under Agbede about 1895.

10. The Anwain claim to have come from Benin indirectly, some groups via Ishan and others via certain Northern Edo communities.

11. Founded by the son of a half-sister of the *Oba* and her lover who fled to the Uromi area.

12. Founded, according to different stories, from Benin or Uzia. Aboriginals and immigrants from Benin kingdom, Uzia, Irua, Ewohimi, Ewu, Emu, Agbor, Agbede, etc.

13. Founded from the Benin kingdom. Immigrants include a group from Uromi.

14. Founded by the brother of the first *Onogie* of Ubijaja. Three villages founded from Uromi.

15. Founded from Benin.

16. Founded by a son of the first *Onogie* of Oria.

17. Very mixed population—Ishan, Igala, Nupe, Yoruba, Kakanda. The Ishan elements in Ifeku Island are mainly from Ugboha.

18. The first *Onogie* a son of the *Oba* of Benin and brother of the first *Onogie* of Uromi. Benin, Uromi, and Ineme immigrants.

19. Founder from Urhonigbe area of Benin kingdom. Immigrants of Benin and Western Ibo origin. The three villages called Idumokaro have their own *Onogie*, claim to constitute a separate chiefdom and to have been the first settlement in the neighbourhood; were founded from Uzebu, the *Esomo's* village at Benin.

20. Founded from Benin. Immigrants from Benin, Irua, and Ekpoma.

* The figures given in the 1952 Census for Ozigolo have been included in Ilushi and Heku Island for which group Ozigolo is sometimes used as an alternative name. The Census lists two other settlements in the North-East Federation, Ehilawhen (322) and Ogbeide (231), which cannot be traced in other sources.

* It is not clear whether the areas of the villages of Ekehelen (*Ekezele*) and Eko-Ibadin (*ekubade*) are included in this figure. If not, the population must be somewhat lower.

* The numbers refer to those against the names of communities in the list on p. 65. A considerable proportion of the population of all communities claims descent from the founder and his followers. Traditions are given without comment.

21. Founded from Benin. Elements of Western Ibo and Ivbiosakon origin.
22. Ugun was founded by a son of an *Onogie* of Ogwa. Uromi, Ekpoma, Agbor, and Urhobo immigrants.
23. Founded by a son of *Oba Osēwēde* of Benin (early 19th century). Western Ibo, Ekpoma, Ebele, Urohi, Urhobo, and Benin immigrants.
24. Igueben founded by a Benin warrior of the Idah campaign. Later immigrants from Benin, Akure (Ondo Province), Awka (Onitsha Province), Ora, Agbor, and other Ishan chiefdoms. Ekekhele (population 1,213) is an Edo-speaking village founded in the time of *Oba Ovorūwē* as a rest-camp for Benin traders. Eko-Ibade (population 454) founded in this century from Uromi.
25. Founder from Benin. Immigrants from Uromi and Kukuruku.
26. Founder and later immigrations from Benin kingdom.
27. The founder came from Benin and apart from recent farm camps the population claims descent from him.
28. Founded from Benin. Immigrants from Ogwa and Okpoji.
29. Founded from Irua.
30. Founded from Benin or Ohodua, but with a very mixed population of Ishan, Igala, Ibo, and Yoruba origins. Includes Igala-speaking village, Inyelen.
31. Founded from Ekpoma. Immigrants from Warri.
32. 33. 34. Three chiefdoms founded by three sons of an *Oba* of Benin. Ewhohimi claims aboriginal, Agbor and later Benin elements. Ewatto has descendants of slaves of the *Exomo* of Benin. Ewossa has immigrants from Egoro, Ewatto, and Agbor.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND POLITICAL SYSTEM

TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION

The characteristic independent¹⁰ political unit of Ishan society is the chiefdom, ruled over by a hereditary chief *onogie* or *onoje*.¹¹ The following appear to be the only exception to this rule:—Ujagbe and Idua¹² are single independent villages and Anwain a group of four villages, all without hereditary chiefs; Uzia is a federation of five villages; Ilushi and Ifeku Island consist of a few small settlements of very mixed origins. The head of the Ishan community in Urho claims the title *Onoje*, while the head of the Igala community is known as the *Igwe*.

In each chiefdom the ultimate unifying factor is allegiance to the *onogie* on the part of the people occupying the territory which is vested in him. With the exception of Egoro and Ugbegun, each of which has one village cut off from the rest, each chiefdom, village, or village group occupies a compact bloc of territory. The chiefdoms have from one to about 20 villages. Where there is a plurality of villages the one containing the *onogie*'s court is invariably called *Egware* or *Egwale* (cf. Edo *egwas* used in the same sense and for the *Oba*'s palace at Benin) and the other villages are collectively called *igule* (Edo *igwe*, a village).

¹⁰ The word "independent" must be qualified in three senses. First, most of these communities admit or admitted some degree of allegiance to the *Oba* of Benin. Secondly, some chiefdoms were subordinate to others, either permanently or from time to time, in certain limited respects. Thirdly, there are, or were, special arrangements between pairs or groups of chiefdoms for the settling of disputes and the punishment of crimes. There are, in addition, ties of a ceremonial nature and other non-political ties between certain chiefdoms. The word "independent" as used here is intended to indicate that the community so described rules itself in most respects and traditionally admits no general subordination to a larger group within Ishan.

¹¹ The title is usually combined with the name of the chiefdom; thus the *Onogie* of Irua is called *Ogirua* and the *Onoje* of Ublaja *Ojeublara*.

¹² Idua is now federated with the "village-chiefdom" of Ukhun.

Villages are normally divided into a number of wards¹³ or *idūvū*, each of which consists of a number of houses grouped round a central clearing (*ughele*) or street. In some cases wards of the same village are clustered together, while in others they are separated by small stretches of bush; a ward may, in fact, be nearer to wards of other villages than to another ward of its own village. Recent movements to the roads have in many cases blurred the separation between wards and even between villages.

Each village lies within its own compact bloc of territory, which includes farming land and usually a zone of high forest. The boundaries between villages in the forest were not always clearly defined in the past.

Within some of the larger chiefdoms there are groupings of villages on the basis of historical and kinship ties and political and judicial considerations. In Uromi there are three and, in Irua, two, "districts" which function as units in political and judicial contexts. One of the districts of Irua comprises the main body of people who claim descent from the founder and his followers, while the other contains mainly later immigrants. The three districts of Uromi—*oberhuā*, *obinuā*, and *oxiōde*—are named after the right and left wings and the centre of a military force. These same names are given to companies which cut across the age-group organization in the Ivbiosakon and Etsako country.

KINSHIP ORGANIZATION

Isban kinship organization has a strong patrilineal bias associated with virilocal marriage but the presence of the *arhewa* or *arewa* form of marriage (see p. 80) in at least some of the chiefdoms must lead to some extent, to bilateral descent groups.

There is considerable variation in the degree of correspondence between kinship units and the territorial organization. Thus, in the Ewohimi group of chiefdoms and in Ekpon, Ukhun, Iduā, Oria, Onogolo, and Ohodua wards, villages and the chiefdom or village-group have stronger lineage nuclei than elsewhere. In Ukhun the wards and, in Oria and Onogolo, the villages, are very small and to a large extent comprise single descent groups. Iduā contains four pairs of descent groups, each pair tracing its descent to a common ancestor.

Elsewhere the ward commonly has a nucleus of the descendants of the founder, but in most cases there are other immigrant descent groups which may be of equal or greater size. In a few cases the prefix *ivi*, meaning "children of," is found in the ward name, but to a much lesser extent than in some of the Northern Edo communities. In most cases the ward and the village (and often the chiefdom) are named after the founder, but some bear the name of the latter's place of origin or of the senior *axaŋvū* title held there (see below).

In some chiefdoms—e.g., Ewohimi, Ekpon, Ohodua, Oria—the component wards of most villages are linked by (putative) patrilineal kinship ties between their founders. In the Ewohimi and Ekpon groups the village headman (see pp. 73-4) is usually the direct descendant of the founder in the senior male line, but it is not clear what proportion of the population actually claims descent from him. In some chiefdoms certain villages have one dominant descent group, while others are more heterogeneous. In Ebele, for instance, the three wards of Egware claim to be descended from three "sons" of the first *onogie*. Idumogo village was founded by a Benin man whose descendants occupy one ward, while two others were founded by descendants of the *Oba* of Benin, and a fourth from the black-

¹³ The distinction between a ward and a village is not always easy to make. Thus the word *idūvū* often appears as a prefix in the name of a village which itself contains a number of wards and in some cases these may be further divided into smaller *idūvū*. As in Benin the prefix *evu* or *evu* is sometimes used in the names of larger settlements but also of chiefdoms—for example, *evuiriŋ*, "the place of the *iriŋ* tree," and *evuoto*, "the place of the grassland." In general, a village is distinguished from a ward by its size and inclusiveness, its spatial isolation and more particularly by the fact that it is often the largest unit which recognizes a single *adūweŋ* and which combines for age-grade activities.

smiths' ward of Benin. The two wards of Ologele village claim descent from immigrants from Urhoniḡbe in the Benin kingdom and the Ivbiosakon area respectively. Okuta village contains three wards founded from Onicha-Alona, Asaba Division, while Okpuje has four wards descended from an immigrant from Uzebum, the *Ezeme's* ward at Benin, and a fifth which is an offshoot of one of the wards of Ologele.

Finally, in some chiefdoms—e.g., Ekpoma and Uromi—most villages are of very heterogeneous descent.

The village-groups within Ekpoma chiefdom, which co-operate in judicial and age-grade activities, are of heterogeneous descent. The village-groups of Irua have a basis of common descent or at least of common origin.

Kinship relations are traced between the founders of various chiefdoms, though there are often different versions of the nature of the relationships. Most of these putative links are patrilineal, but it is said at Emu that the *enigie* of Emu, Okhuesan, and Ohodua are descended from one woman who married the first *onogie* of each of these chiefdoms in turn. The Ubiaja people extend this story to include the *enigie* of Ugboha and Ubiaja.

Wards are frequently but not invariably reported to be exogamous units, but it may be that the marriage regulations apply to the dominant descent group in the ward rather than to the local group as such. Whole villages are rarely exogamous and in some cases where several ward-descent groups claim common descent the exogamic bond has been ritually severed. On the other hand, groups of wards from the same and from different villages are sometimes reported to constitute single exogamous groups, while in Okpoji marriage is forbidden between members of the villages of Iki and Ikiewan. Communities related through their founders retain ritual ties, in some cases, even when they are allowed to intermarry.

A system of dispersed clans is reported at Uromi. Six principal clans are named, each one being called after its founder. Members of any one clan are found in two or more villages, that to which the *onogie* belongs being most widely dispersed. *Ekaḡvō* titles are apparently held within the clans. Elsewhere in Ishan some of the morning greetings characteristic of the dispersed clans of Benin are in common use.

AGE-GRADE AND AGE-SET ORGANIZATION

The male population of all Ishan villages (except in Ilushi) is organized on an age-grade basis very similar to that of the Benin kingdom. There are, in most communities, three main age-grades or *ofu*, the commonest names for which are:—

1. *egbōnughele*,¹⁴ (*izaevolo* in Uzia).
2. *ighele* (*igele*, *igeni*) or *igbama*; *elārhuḡ* in Uzia.
3. *edī*; (*ikpīxai* in Uzia).

The middle age-grade is called *igbama* in the Ewohimi group and some other chiefdoms in the south-east but in Ekpoma and some neighbouring communities the word is used for the "junior *edī*" who have performed the ceremony necessary to free themselves from communal labour but who are not considered ready for full participation in village meetings. In Okpoji, according to Butcher, the name is given to people who have special judicial functions.

In the Ewohimi group named¹⁵ age-sets are formed every one to three years, at Uzia every three years and at Idua every five years and they take their place in the *egbōnughele* grade. They are probably present elsewhere but in some communities appointments and promotions are said to take place when the need arises.¹⁶ In

¹⁴ The name seems to refer to the traditional task of sweeping the *ughele*, the central clearing of the village.

¹⁵ The same names are said to be given in Uromi, Ekpoma and Egoro, to companies to which members of the *egbōnughele* or *ighele* grades are assigned. It is not clear whether these are sub-grades or whether they cut across age groupings.

¹⁶ Butcher reports a ceremony at Okpoji in which 20 men were promoted from the lower to the middle grade, the last promotion having taken place about three years previously.

Ewu, Ukhun, and Idua there are reported to be sub-divisions of this grade, ranked according to seniority. The *egbomughele* are equivalent to the *iroghae* of Edo villages. Their activities include, in various communities, clearing and sweeping paths, streets, clearings, and meeting-places, cleaning and repairing shrines and carrying wood and water and mixing mud for building purposes.

The normal age of promotion to the *ighele* grade is said to vary between the early twenties and middle thirties. In some communities the grade is divided into three sub-grades the senior of which is called *otuneka* or *otunika*.¹⁷ In Ewu, Idua, and Ukhun selection for this grade is said to depend on ability as well as age; its members are the leaders of the two lower grades and they have a right to settle disputes and punish offences which arise in connection with age-grade activities. The head of the *ighele* grade in ward or village is called *adiigewi* at Irua and *adiiduwu* in some of the Uromi villages. The grade as a whole is responsible for maintaining law and order within the community and provides warriors for defence and attack *vis-à-vis* other communities. Its members also take part in the heavier communal tasks and in some communities play an advisory or executive role in village or ward meetings. Executive officials such as *egale* and *inotu* are recruited from the *ighele*. At Uromi special tasks accorded to the named companies (see footnote 17) are the enforcement of regulations against the spreading of disease and the driving out of witches.

As among other Edo-speaking peoples the *edi*, led by the *adiwure*, are the main repository of custom and authority within the village though in some chiefdoms they may be overshadowed by the title-holders. They are exempt from manual labour for the community. Their political and judicial functions will be described below.

The age-grades seem generally to be organised on a village-wide basis in respect of appointments, promotions, and communal activities though they sometimes function at the ward level, and it is reported that in one or two cases a number of villages may co-operate for initiation and promotion ceremonies.

Entrance into the lowest grade generally involves little ceremony. Promotion to the other grades depends to a large extent upon age, but other factors are involved. These include such qualifications as the proper obsequies for one's father, marriage, and the begetting of a child, payments to the *edi*, and sometimes to the *onogie* and title-holders, the provision of feasts and the undergoing of ceremonies of qualification and promotion. Some of these will be described below.

THE *Enigie*

With a few exceptions¹⁸ the autonomous political communities of Ishan are ruled over by hereditary chiefs called *enigie* (sing. *onogie*).¹⁹ The *onogie* invariably occupies the village called *Egware* or *Egwale*. (See above, p. 67.)

In each case the origin of the *onogie* title is traced to the founder of the community or his "son." Some founders are said to have received their titles from the *Oba* before leaving Benin. Others fled but later submitted and were given titles in return for allegiance. Some were conquered and treated in the same way.

¹⁷ *Otuneka* means, literally, "the three *otu*." Butcher, in his study of the *otu* system of Ekpoma, Egoro, Okpoji, Uromi, and Ewuhimi, reports that *otuneka* is sometimes said to be an intermediate grade between the two lower grades. He seems to identify the term with the three sections of a fighting force, *oriode*, *oberhwa*, and *obinwa*, which are also found among the Iyákoakon and Etsako and suggests that they may be recruited from among the two lower grades.

¹⁸ Uzla has four *enigie* for five villages but none of these is regarded as the head of the whole village group; the fifth village is headed by the senior man in one of two families who exercise the right of appointment alternately. Two of the four wards of Ujagbe have *enigie* but the headman of the village is the senior *adiwure*. Idua and Ilushi have no *enigie*.

¹⁹ The hereditary chief of Igubeben is called *obaigb*—leader of the smiths. The name refers to the traditional task of the Igubeben smiths to make the ceremonial swords, *ebé*, for the *Oba* of Benin.

A few titles may have been copied from other Ishan chiefdoms without reference to Benin and without the *Oba's* confirmation.

In the great majority of cases the title is hereditary, the deceased *onogie* being succeeded by his eldest surviving son. Ukhun, where the succession passes collaterally, is an exception to this rule. In order to be fully recognized an *onogie* must have his title confirmed by the *Oba* of Benin.²⁰ At Ekpoma when the *onogie* dies his heir sends a message to the *Oba* who, if he approves the succession, sends back a white cloth as a sign that the heir may proceed with his father's mortuary rites, thus validating his right to the title. When the rites have been completed he sends again to the *Oba* for the swords *ada* and *cbē*; the former signifies the *Oba's* delegation to him of the right of life and death over his people. At Okpoji, where the custom is similar, this request is said to have been accompanied by a gift of seven slaves and it might be one to three years before the swords arrived, accompanied by two Benin chiefs and many followers. In other chiefdoms it seems to have been necessary for the heir himself to travel to Benin. The *Oba* settled disputes which arose in connection with the succession.

The most important article of regalia conferred by the *Oba* on an *onogie* was the *ada*, for reasons stated above. In a few cases it is doubtful whether the *onogie* received this. The *Onogie* of Ewatto, for example, has only an *ebē*, his title being confirmed by the *Onogie* of Ewohimi, who is himself subject to the *Oba*. An *onogie* who receives the *ada* is called *ojeada*. This title is apparently not applicable to some of the *enigie* of chiefdoms, to those of the villages of Uzia, the wards of Ujagbe or to those heads of villages within other chiefdoms who claim the title *onogie*. Other regalia owned by *enigie* and claimed to be gifts from the *Oba* include a brass helmet (at Ukhun), an execution sword, a band of beads worn round the forehead (*odigba*) and special drums.

The full-scale *onogie* is the nominal owner of the land of the chiefdom. In virtue of this he has the same kind of political, judicial, economic, and spiritual rights over its people as the *Oba* exercises in the Benin kingdom. He has the right to create *exalté* titles and to confer them on his subjects and his approval is necessary for succession to those titles. The title-holders are his representatives in the villages and his courtiers. His political and judicial roles are described below.

The *enigie* have well-defined rights over property, persons, and services which, however, vary from chiefdom to chiefdom. Economic rights everywhere include a regular tribute of foodstuffs such as yams, kola-nuts, palm-oil, and palm-wine. At Ewohimi this tribute is paid in connection with certain annual rites. The *enigie* can call on their subjects to provide labour for house-building and for farming at the clearing and harvesting seasons. On such occasions it is their duty to feed the labourers. In some villages of Uromi the *onogie* is said to receive the property of any person who dies without heirs.

The *enigie* have certain rights over game and domestic animals. Leopards and pythons are said to belong to them and in return for their carcasses or skins they make gifts to the hunters. They can also claim fixed portions of big game such as bush-pig and bush-cow. Rights over domestic animals include the following:—In several chiefdoms when a cow bears twin calves all three must be presented to the *onogie*, who gives a wife to the owner. A similar rule applies to goats and sheep which produce four kids or lambs. Freak animals, animals falling into latrines and animals killed by others of the same species are among others to which he has a right.

In various chiefdoms the *enigie* is reported as having a variety of rights over persons. In many cases criminals become his slaves. At Ekpoma falling into a latrine would make a man liable to become the *onogie's* slave. All war captives belong to the *onogie* and at Uromi any person found wandering about without good reason might be enslaved by him. At Ebele, the *onogie*, on his succession, could

²⁰ This is no longer necessary though the practice is still carried on to some extent.

claim any man as his servant and in some chiefdoms it was necessary for any person taking a title to give a boy to the *onogie*.

Many rights over women are reported. At Ekpoma, Uromi, and Ebele the *onogie* can make any woman his wife by hanging a string of coral beads round her neck, while at Ugbegun the chief need pay only two cowries to secure a girl. When the *igbã* oath is pronounced in respect of any woman by herself or any man she immediately becomes the *onogie's* wife and, as in Benin, this oath may be revoked only by the holder of the *Oshodi* title. In some chiefdoms men are said to send refractory wives to the *onogie* who may, if he wishes, replace them or return them after a period of corrective punishment at *Egwere*. At Irua, Ekpoma, and Uromi a woman who sits on the chief's throne immediately becomes his wife and some women apparently used the throne as a sanctuary to avoid punishment for an offence. When an Uromi woman bore triplets the *onogie* presented her with a slave in return for which one of the children became his wife when grown up. A person taking the *ogbe* title at Ubiaja should present a boy and a girl to the *onogie*, the latter to become his wife or to be betrothed by him to another person.

THE *Exaŋvõ*

Individual titles of the Benin type are found throughout Ishan with the exception of Idua, Uzia, Ujagbe, and Illushi. Ukhun has a title-association, probably of the Ivbiosakon type, but in recent years individual titles have been adopted as a result of contact with other Ishan groups. The actual titles are, in most cases, copied directly from Benin. *Iyase*, *Edogun*, *Ẹzomo*, *Oliha*, *Oshodi*, and other similar titles figure prominently in most chiefdoms. Their holders are called, collectively *exaŋvõ* (sing. *xaŋvõ*).

In each chiefdom the *onogie* has the sole right to create and confer titles. The *enigie* of Uromi are said to have given titles in the past as a reward for services, to persuade strangers to settle down under their rule and to provide themselves with a chiefly retinue. In applying for a title a man would distribute cattle and cowries to existing title-holders and would on his appointment present the *onogie* with his son to act as sword-bearer (*omada*). When the son grew up the *onogie* gave him a wife and sent him back home. At Ugbegun a new title-holder should betroth a daughter to his chief.

On his death an *xaŋvõ* is normally succeeded by his eldest surviving son. In most chiefdoms, however, he is expected to make payments in cash or kind to the *onogie* before the latter will recognize him. The correct performance of the mortuary rites of the deceased title-holder is a pre-requisite for his son's valid succession and these cannot be carried out without the *onogie's* permission. At Okpoji the *onogie* should first go to the deceased's farm, sacrifice a fowl and take away some yams. At Ebele the heir should present the *onogie* with one or two cows to be used in a feast in his honour, and gifts are due to the *onogie* and *ediŋ*. It is reported that at Urohi a man cannot have full *xaŋvõ* status until he is a member of the senior age-grade. The failure of the heir to fulfil the qualifications necessary to take over his father's title has apparently led in some cases to its being awarded to another person. A member of the family which first held the title then usually claims it as its own and there is apparent duplication. It may, however, be possible for titles to be duplicated in other circumstances; in Ekpoma each of the titles *Esogban*, *Osuma*, and *Ẹzomo* are found in three separate villages.

The title system appears to perform three sets of functions:—

1. It provides the *onogie* with a set of private councillors, an aristocratic retinue and officials to fill ritual and secular state offices. Titles associated with particular duties tend to be concentrated in *Egwere* though this is not invariably the case. Titles often carry the same duties and privileges as their counterparts at Benin. Thus, at Irua, the *Unwagwe* occupies the *onogie's* throne during the interregnum between the death of the chief and the accession of his successor and the

Iyase, as in many chiefdoms, is the senior war-captain. A third title-holder, the *Ozara*, is responsible for the burial of the *onogie* and the installation of his successor. The title *Eychi*, corresponding to *Ehioba* at Benin, is current in a number of chiefdoms and is held by both a man and a woman, the latter probably the *onogie*'s wife. Both had to die when the *onogie* died. At Uromi there are titles corresponding to the offices of sacrificial executioner, guardian of the queen-mother's shrine, keeper of the *onogie*'s farm, harem, etc.

2. The *exaŋvō* who live in the *igule* villages play an important part in the administration of the chiefdom as the *onogie*'s representatives. Together with the court officials they form the state council and the highest-ranking among them are sometimes members of an inner council. At Ewohimi and Ekpon, where villages are more closely associated with descent groups, the senior *exaŋvō* of the village is usually its headman and keeper of the founder's shrine. In Uromi and Irua certain title-holders are the governors of districts.

3. Many titles were apparently taken in the past merely to enhance status and prestige and secure the favours of the *onogie*. Taking a title was a means of acquiring wealth, and it conferred benefits such as exemption from communal labour and from seizure of property for debt, compensation, etc.

Titles are said to be ranked in both village and chiefdom though the correct order is not always agreed upon.

At the present day many titles are vacant, their functions having largely disappeared. During the period of British administration the main reason for title-taking has been the hope of acquiring Native Court membership.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The political organization of most Ishan communities is compounded of three main elements—the age-grade organization, the title-system, and hereditary chieftainship.

Village and Ward

In most chiefdoms authority at the ward and village level is achieved through the age-grade organization. Each ward has its *adīŋwere*, the oldest man (subject to certain qualifications which vary from community to community). The senior *adīŋwere*¹ is the village headman and he has the right to summon meetings of the village council whose core, in all cases, is the *edīŋ* age-grade. In some cases priests of important shrines, the leaders of the lower age-grades and other officials may attend, but they are not generally expected to initiate discussion or to take decisions.

In the *igule* villages of most chiefdoms the *exaŋvō* function mainly as the representatives of the *onogie*. In some chiefdoms such as Ekpoma, Egoro, and Okpoji *exaŋvō* are said to have no special status outside the age-grade to which they belong except in so far as they speak for the *onogie*. Their role in particular meetings may depend on the topics under consideration. If the meeting concerns matters of interest to the village alone they take part only by virtue of their age-grade status. On the other hand, if the object of the meeting is to convey the *onogie*'s messages or instructions they may take on more authority. It is reported that at Ewu, for example, in these circumstances the senior *exaŋvō* of the village speaks first, putting forward the *onogie*'s orders and consulting the *edīŋ* as to the manner in which they should be carried out, but it is the *adīŋwere* who issues the final instructions through a spokesman who is, in many cases, the *exaŋvō* himself.

At Ekpon and in the Ewohimi group the title-holders appear to have greater authority within the village than elsewhere. As noted above, wards and villages in these chiefdoms are more closely associated with particular descent groups. The senior *exaŋvō* is the direct descendant of the village founder, the head of the senior

¹ At Ekpoma and Egoro he is the senior man by age, ward affiliation being irrelevant, but this may not be universally so.

descent group and the village headman. At Ekpon it is he who approves promotions to the senior age-grade and who summons village meetings, the *odiwere*'s main tasks being to assist him with advice and support and to supervise the age-grades. The same is true of those villages of Ewuhimi which have an *axafo*.

There is evidence that in some other chiefdoms, too, the senior *axafo* may be accorded a special status in the internal organization of the village. In two Uromi villages the senior title-holders are ranked as third and fourth *edi* respectively, but apparently there are many *axafo* titles which do not, in themselves, carry any political authority. The actual powers of title-holders in any Ishan community must depend considerably upon the power, recognition, and support of the *owogie* and on their own abilities, personalities, and circumstances.

Among the special executive roles within the village that of *agale* or *agare* (pl. *egale*, *egare*; probably from Edo *ghae*, to divide or share out) seems most widespread. The *egale* distribute the age-grade promotion fees, gifts, food at feasts or sacrifices, and fines among the *edi* and others who may have a right to share. Their ability to do so depends on a knowledge of precedence in the village. They act, too, in the capacity of messengers of the village council, being responsible, in some cases, for the attendance of individuals required to be present. The manner of their appointment varies. In different Ekpoma villages it is said variously that the third *edi* may hold the appointment, that the *egale* may be selected by the *odiwere* from among the *igbama* (junior *edi*) or that an *igbele* may be chosen who will keep the position until he becomes *odiwere*. At Okpoji there is an *agale* from each ward, while at Irua there are from two to six, depending on the size of the village, the senior one usually being an *edi*; here the position is occasionally an hereditary one. At Urohi the office is said not to exist, its function being performed by any junior *edi*.

At Irua the *odiwere* (here called *odiwegbere*) has a spokesman to whom he entrusts his staff of office (*okbo*) and who can deputise for him at village or inter-village meetings. In some other communities *axafo* are said to act as spokesmen, and orders for the execution of the decisions of the *edi* may be issued through them. Generally speaking, however, the orders of the village councils are carried out by the members of the two lower age-grades, supervised by their own leaders or by *edi* appointed for the purpose in hand.

Village-Groups and Districts

Groups of villages within some of the larger chiefdoms are said to hold joint meetings but there is no information as to the contexts in which these occur. They may have existed primarily for the settling of disputes between members of the various villages.

Irua and Uromi have better defined "districts." The Otoruwa district of Irua holds special meetings in the senior ward of *Egware*, presided over by the senior *odiwegbere*. The Uwesa district has a meeting at Igiauwo, presided over by the *Iyase*. Meetings are, however, said to be infrequent. They are attended by delegations from the various villages, the delegates being, in some villages, the *inolu*, who are said to form an intermediate grade between *igeni* and *edi*.

The three districts of Uromi undoubtedly have a military origin. They bear the names of the three sections of a fighting force and each has its own *inolu* organization which formerly supplied warriors and dealt with serious offences on the *owogie*'s behalf. Each district is governed by an *okakuo* or war-captain who is always the senior *axafo*.

The focus of the unity of each chiefdom is the *owogie* and his court. In theory he was an autocrat with the power of life and death over his subjects and extensive economic, political, judicial, and spiritual rights. The centralization of authority is achieved to a large extent through the *axafo* who reside in the *igale* villages. There they represent the *owogie*'s interests, organizing the collection of tribute, the

provision of services, military and otherwise, and passing on the chief's instructions to the *adišwere* and *ediš*. They are responsible to the *onogie* for the well-being, peace, and loyalty of the villages. On the other hand they lead delegations of *ediš* from the villages to the *onogie*. Where there are a number of *exašvū* in a village it may only be the senior ones among them who play this political role. Where there are none, the *onogie*'s instructions are carried by his messengers directly to the *adišwere*.

It is reported that in some chiefdoms there was formerly a state council composed of all the *ediš* and *exašvū* of the chiefdom. It seems probable, however, that its meetings were generally attended only by the *exašvū* or by small delegations of *ediš*. The *Onogie* of Uromi has an inner council consisting of the seven most senior title-holders, six of whom come from villages other than *Egware*. It seems probable that where there is a well-organized court the *onogie*'s household officers are his closest advisers and supporters.

There are no details available of the functioning of the state councils or the topics which they discuss. One report suggests that at Uromi they met only in connection with the organization of warfare and for ritual purposes.

Political relations between chiefdoms: there is little information concerning the political relations which existed between the Ishan chiefdoms prior to British rule. Certain *enigie* claim seniority over others and the *Onogie* of Irua claims the title *Ogiesā*—*Onogie* of Ishan. A former *Onogie* of the large chiefdom of Irua said that all other *enigie* should lower their swords in his presence, that sword-bearers were sent to him from all over Ishan and that he alone had jurisdiction in murder trials. None of this is confirmed from other sources and the last claim appears very unlikely.

Certain chiefdoms claim that others which were originally offshoots of them continued to pay tribute or make regular gifts to their *enigie*. This, however, is usually denied by the chiefdoms held to be subordinate.

Arrangements existed between a few chiefdoms in respect of the punishment of certain offences (see p. 68). The most closely related chiefdoms appear to have been those of the Ewohimi group, Ewossa and Ewatto being offshoots of Ewohimi; the *Onogie* of Ewatto was confirmed in his title by the *Onogie* of Ewohimi, who also reserved the right to sentence to death anyone who committed adultery with a wife of either of the other two *enigie*.

Some chiefdoms claim superiority over others as a result of special privileges conferred by the *Oba* of Benin. The *Onogie* of Ebele claims to have had a supervisory authority over a number of neighbouring communities and the *Okaigā* of Igueben claims that only he could present the *enigie* of eastern Ishan to the *Oba*, a favour for which he required the gift of a cow.

The internal political system of Ishan as a whole appears to have been a complex of friendly and hostile relations between chiefdoms and loosely-associated alliances of chiefdoms. Some of these may have reached a considerable degree of permanence. The Ekpoma-Egoro-Okpoji group, for instance, were always friendly while they were continually at war with Irua which was, in turn, in alliance with Uromi. The main purpose of warfare seems to have been the capture of slaves rather than territory. It also arose through the abduction of wives, and other offences and disputes involving members of different chiefdoms. In some cases oaths of friendship forbidding the shedding of blood were sworn between chiefdoms.

Political Relations with Benin

Only the people of the extreme eastern borders of Ishan—Oria, Onogolo, and Illushi—do not regard themselves as in some sense subjects of the *Oba* of Benin. The dependence of the *enigie* on the *Oba* for the validity of their titles has been described above (p. 71). Each new *Oba* on his accession sends pieces of

chalk to each *onogie*. Acceptance of these indicates their willingness to recognize his suzerainty. Refusal, in the past, would normally have resulted in a punitive expedition.

Each chiefdom had as its intermediary with the *Oba* one of the chiefs in Benin. The Ewohimi-Ewatto-Ewossa group was under the *Eromo* of Benin who is known as *Ogiesi*; he still maintains close relations with the people of that area. Ekpon came under the *Unwagwe* and Ekpoma under the *Osuna*. Their duty was to maintain peaceful relations in the area under their control, to introduce visitors from Ishan to the *Oba* and to organize the collection of tribute of which they themselves claimed a portion. Tribute was in the form of yams, palm-oil, livestock, etc., and slaves; it seems to have been customary to send recalcitrant slaves and the worst criminals to the *Oba*. It is unlikely that Urho, Oria, and Onogolo paid tribute in recent times, nor did Ugboha after the coming of the Nupe.

Many of the chiefdoms admit that permanent agents of the *Oba* were stationed in their towns. It is not clear, however, whether they were responsible to the *Oba* directly or through the chiefs in Benin.

Some of the Ishan chiefdoms provided warriors on various occasions for the *Oba's* army. Ekpoma and neighbouring chiefdoms assisted in the reconquest of Akure in the early part of the last century. Later on, however, Ishan chiefdoms joined both sides in a war of succession to the Benin throne.

LAND TENURE

The *onogie* is often said to be the owner of the land, but this statement seems to refer to his political authority over its occupiers and users rather than to actual control of its use.

The smallest unit with exclusive rights over land is usually the village, though in some cases it may be the ward. The *adiasere* holds the land in trust for his people. Individuals and kin-groups have no permanent rights over particular tracts except in so far as they may be identified with villages or wards. Land is plentiful in most areas and disputes over it few. At the present day, however, many disputes arise over the ownership of permanent crops such as rubber and cocoa.

Any person may clear bush on the land of his village or ward for the purpose of farming. The usufruct of the cleared land remains his only so long as he is actually cultivating it or so long as it is occupied by his crops. When the latter are exhausted it reverts to the community. Farms are usually planted in two successive years, but the owner may continue to harvest cassava and plantains for a year or two longer. It is reported that at Irua rights in fallow may be claimed up to four years after the farm is abandoned, but there is no evidence that this is the general practice. The fallow period is said to be seven or eight years in some areas. At Irua no man can be deprived of his land unless he is expelled from the community for criminal offences.

Within some chiefdoms there are areas of high forest not parcelled out between villages. These are available to the whole population for gathering and hunting, and, depending on the political relations between them, certain chiefdoms seem to have shared these rights. One report states that a village or ward whose land abuts on a particular area of high forest has a prior right to clear it.

At Irua the selling and pawning of land is forbidden. Strangers must seek permission from the village elders before making a farm on its territory. Rents are not payable, but the stranger is expected to make gifts in kind to the elders. He acquires the same rights of tenure as the natives.

The planting of permanent crops in the present century has brought about some changes. Any person may plant permanent crops on the land of his ward or village, and he cannot be disturbed so long as the crops remain there, but theoretically he acquires no permanent rights in the land itself. Another complicating factor arises from the fact that while the land itself is inalienable the crops on

it can be sold, pledged, or mortgaged. They cannot, however, be alienated to strangers without permission of the *onogie*.

A native can build anywhere on the land of his village and an Ishan stranger can build in any village with permission from the elders. The builder can alienate his house to another Ishan person, but not to a stranger except with the *onogie*'s permission.

Rights over fishing streams and pools are communal to the village or ward. Open and closed seasons are observed.

INHERITANCE

It is reported that at Irua the head of a family usually divided a certain amount of his property between his heirs before he died. After death his property is inherited within his patrilineage. The eldest surviving son is the principal heir, but he must validate his claim by properly carrying out his father's funeral ceremonies. If he fails to do this he still retains the property until his death, but his brother might step in and perform the rites and take over the property. During a man's lifetime the heart of any animal sacrificed in his house is eaten by his senior son. This signifies the latter's status as principal heir.²²

In some communities all the property is said to go to the senior son, who may make gifts to all his brothers or to the senior sons of his father's other wives who may in turn give shares to their own full brothers. Elsewhere the senior son takes the largest share, but the rest have a recognized right to some of the property. The property due to a son who is a minor may be kept in trust for him by his mother or elder brother.

When all the sons are minors the father's brother takes control of the property. He is allowed to make use of it,²³ but must accept responsibility to care for the deceased's children and to provide the sons with wives.

If there are no sons the father's brother inherits, though he may be expected to give shares of the movable property to adult daughters of the deceased. At Irua, in the absence of sons, the house goes to the father's brother and movable property to the daughters. In some villages of Uromi the *onogie* is said to inherit the property of a man who dies without sons; this seems to apply elsewhere where a man dies without any heirs.

At Irua, Uromi, and Ubiaja a posthumous son passes to the man who inherits his mother. According to Thomas he ranks before any subsequent children of this marriage at Irua in respect of inheritance of property. At Iglauwe this is said not to apply, though the foster-father is expected to provide him with a wife.

A woman's property, which may include cattle, trees, slaves and, at Ubiaja, a house as well as household utensils, etc., is normally inherited by her eldest son. Failing sons, daughters may inherit the household objects and possibly the remainder, but this sometimes goes to the widower. Thomas states that at Uromi the property of a woman who dies without sons goes to the *onogie*'s mother.

THE LIFE CYCLE²⁴

BIRTH

At Irua the husband of a pregnant woman provides medicine for her to rub on her body three months after conception and from the seventh month onwards she rubs herself with certain leaves dipped in water. She wears a belt studded with

²² Personal communication from Dr. Christopher Okojie.

²³ This applies only to a full brother at Irua; a half-brother must account for the property when the senior son comes of age.

²⁴ See Thomas, 1910 (1), pt. 1, "Birth Customs", "Burial Customs".

cowries and containing certain "medicines" which is obtained from a woman "doctor".

Delivery usually takes place at the house of the husband or the wife's mother. The woman is assisted by the members of the compound, who sometimes purify her by touching her head and body with a fowl which is then thrown into the road. The child is washed at the front of the house and the mother at the back where the placenta is buried. The baby's hair is shaved off and thrown away and the cord tied in a leaf and hung either in the roof of the house or in a coconut tree.

The father of the house provides seven yams and a large pot of oil which are shared by the women of the compound except for one yam which is placed at the head of the bed where the child sleeps. On the seventh day the parents entertain their relatives and the mother is marked with chalk on her legs and forehead. Three months later there is a further feast which marks the time for her to loosen and wash her hair. According to one account it is at this time that the child is named, "the eldest male relative" throwing it into the air and blowing four times into each ear.

GUARDIANSHIP

At Irua, when a child is born, the first man or woman to enter the house who is not a close relative becomes the child's guardian (*wa*) for life. Children of wealthy parents have more than one guardian. When the guardian dies the child obtains an *axerhe* (carved staff) to represent his spirit and worships him as an ancestor.

CIRCUMCISION

Male children are circumcised at from three months to 10 years of age. It is reported that in some areas girls undergo a corresponding operation after puberty but there are no details concerning the procedure.

INITIATION CEREMONIES

A *rite de passage* called *irhu* is reported for all parts of Ishan, but it differs widely in detail and significance. The word means, literally, "I put on (cloth)" and refers to the ritual tying of a cloth on the celebrant.

In a number of chiefdoms *irhu* is a necessary qualification for promotion from one age-grade to another, while in others it is a part of the actual promotion ceremony. In Egoro, Ewohimi, and Ekpoma a man cannot become an *ighele* or in Ekpoma an *axafu* without first performing it. Mr. H. L. M. Butcher observed an *irhu* ceremony at Ekpoma in 1932, which lasted seven days. On the first day the candidate presented coconuts, kola-nuts, and palm-wine to the *adiwere* of his village, who tied a cloth round his hips. From then until the sixth day he was free from all duties. He ate meat at all meals and could expect to receive a gift at each household he visited. The *adi* made chalk marks on his chest, forehead, and shoulders as a sign of his ritual status. On the sixth day he provided a cow for sacrifice, which was cooked by the women of the village. The following evening everyone gathered round the carved staff in the centre of the village which represents the spirits of past *ewigie*²³ and the candidate wrestled with and, by arrangement, defeated a contemporary who had not performed this ceremony.²⁴ The meat provided by the candidate, together with a large quantity of pounded yam, was brought forward and examined by the *adi* to see if it was sufficient. Then, after a sacrifice to the spirits of the *ewigie*, it was divided by the *agale* between

²³ The ceremony observed was at Egbare. In any other village it would take place before the shrine of the *adi* spirits.

²⁴ At Ewohimi he would be further required to lose to one who had previously performed *irhu*.

the *onogie*, *edi*, and *ighele*. Two more pots of fufu, cooked by the candidate's wife, and a jug of palm-wine, were shared out between the rest of the people to take to their homes and the candidate continued to entertain the members of his own age-grade with feasting, drinking, dancing, and gunfire until the morning of the eighth day.

Irhue may be performed at Egoro whenever the candidate or his family are able to afford it.

At Obolo, in Emu chiefdom, a similar rite appears to be performed at promotion both to *ighele* and to *adi* status, the latter occasion involving more expenses and lasting nine days. At Okpoji, Egware-Ekpon, and Ujogba it precedes promotion to *adi* only. At Ekpon and probably elsewhere it cannot be performed until a man has a wife and child.

In several chiefdoms *irhue* is said not to be relevant to age-grade status. At Ohoduwa at the birth of a man's first child the *edi* ceremonially tie on his waist cloth, for which service they receive gifts of coconuts and palm-wine. At Uromi it is a display of wealth which allows him to carry out his father's mortuary rites and thus validate his inheritance and which effects the type of burial he will be given after his own death. Whereas elsewhere it is an affair for the village as a whole, here it takes place before the celebrant's own family altar.

At Uzia both boys and girls celebrate *irhue* at puberty without great expense. At Igueben, on the other hand, it is the last ritual performance of a man's life and is so costly that in 1936 only three men had performed it. Feasts must be given to the celebrant's own family, the village, and the chiefdom. On an appointed day the candidate is presented to those who have performed the rite and fibre garments are tied round him. With a following of boys he dances from house to house exchanging gifts of kola-nut and fufu at each. Seven days later he feasts the whole chiefdom with a cow, then entertains his own age-mates. The following morning he wrestles with a contemporary and, to complete the rite, sweeps the front of his house. He then becomes free from all labours and can be buried in his house when he dies.

AGE-GRADE PROMOTION CEREMONIES

In some villages of the Emu chiefdom and probably elsewhere *irhue* is the main component of age-grade promotion ceremonies. In five chiefdoms observed by Butcher, however, the two types of ceremony are distinct. Promotion generally involves gifts of coconuts, kola-nuts, palm-wine, and fufu to the *edi* and offerings at the shrine of the *edi* spirits of the village. At Iki village, Okpoji, in 1932, it was decided that the *ighele* *otu* needed replenishing and 20 young men were accepted for promotion to it. The last similar ceremony had taken place three years previously. On a day fixed by the *adi* were the *egale* were sent to summon the *edi* and *ighele* of the village. Meanwhile the *egbonughele* danced round carrying matchets and firing guns charged with powder provided by the candidates. When the *edi* were assembled the senior candidate, on behalf of the rest, presented them with the usual gifts. These were used in making offerings to the *edi* spirits and divided between the *edi*, the leaders of the *ighele* grade, and the *egale*. The *adi* were then informed the youths of their duties and gave them the name *ugigbedi*, "supporters of the elders". The youths were blessed by the *adi* and their foreheads marked with chalk by the senior *egale*.

At Uromi there is said to be no ceremonial at this stage. Candidates for promotion to *adi* status perform two ceremonies, one before their extended families and the other a village affair. Neither can be undergone by a man who has not carried out his father's mortuary rites. At Ewohimi promotion to the middle age-grade involves only presentation of wine to the senior *igbama* (*ighele*) and entertaining one's own relatives. When a man wishes to become *adi* he first gives a calabash of palm-wine and a bundle of yams to the senior descendant of the village-

founder. If the latter approves, further gifts are made to each *ada* in turn. If all agree, he waits till the next festival of worship to the village ancestors, when he gives wine to the *ada* who fires a gun to signify that the promotion is made.

Generally speaking, promotions are effected in groups, though at Ewohimi it is reported that these rarely contain more than two or three persons.

Among the northern groups studied by Butcher, when an *ada* died he was succeeded immediately by the next oldest man who performed a ceremony at the *ada* shrine. At Ewohimi he was replaced by his son until the latter had performed his mortuary rites.

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

A custom known as *arhewa* or *arewa*, apparently similar to the *isomi* marriage of Etsako (see p. 108), is reported for some areas of Ishan. Thomas states that at Igiauwe village, Irua, for example, an unmarried daughter whose father dies without sons must remain in her father's house where she may be joined by the latter's brother. If she bears a son he becomes heir to the house. It is not clear whether such a woman contracts a regular form of marriage with one man, nor whether the custom is confined to this particular circumstance, nor how widespread it is. Thomas says that it is not customary at Ubiaja, but it is reported at Urowa, Ewohimi, and elsewhere.²⁷ An institution closely parallel to *isomi* marriage is found at Uzia. Here there are two forms of marriage, *ami* and *osi*. In an *ami* marriage full bride-price is paid and the children belong to the father's lineage. In *osi* marriage the bride-price is reduced and the children are affiliated to the mother's descent group. Within Uzia itself the latter is apparently the only form of marriage practised though one report says that Islamic influence has altered this custom in two villages. *Ami* marriage obtains in unions contracted with members of other chiefdoms.

The more general form of residence in Ishan is virilocal and the children belong to the husband's patrilineage. At Irua the suitor first approaches the parents through an intermediary, sending yams to the father and the fruit of the palm-tree to the mother. If accepted he begins to assist them in house-building and farming, and makes periodic gifts of food and palm-wine. The bride-price at Irua was formerly the equivalent of 25s. in cowries to the father and a fifth of this to the mother. After the British conquest it became fixed at £10. The present value is not available. The girl is eventually delivered to the husband on an appointed evening by a female relative and friends.

Widows pass to the heirs of the deceased in his patrilineage, generally to his sons or, failing sons, to his brothers. At Irua the eldest son is said to take all wives except his own mother who passes to the next senior son by a different mother. In all cases the heirs become responsible for the care of the deceased's children. It is reported by Thomas that in some areas wives may be reserved for minor sons until they are grown up. In the meantime they may take lovers, but any children they produce "belong" to the sons for whom they are destined.

In the past a man could divorce his wife by sending her to the *onogie* who, if he wished, might replace her. At the present day women can obtain divorce from criminals or men with loathsome diseases or by simply returning the bride-price through the Native Court.

DEATH AND MORTUARY RITES

Mortuary rites appear to be similar to those of Benin. Thomas gives details of their variation in a few communities, but it is not possible to summarize this material here.²⁸

²⁷ At Urowa an *arhewa* woman may, on the birth of a grandchild, acquire the status of *ada* but this does not give her a right to sit on the village council.

²⁸ Thomas, 1920 (2).

III. THE NORTHERN EDO¹

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This section deals with the Edo-speaking peoples of the Kukuruku Division of Benin Province who are estimated to number about 185,000. General features of the geographical environment, economy and technology of the whole area are described immediately below, but for a description of their traditions, history, social organization, and culture the Northern Edo are divided into four groups which are dealt with separately.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The Kukuruku Division is, for the most part, rolling upland country, rising from the valleys of the Orle and Edion Rivers towards the north where ridges of rocky hills outcrop. The hills are of weathered granite, the lower ones covered with laterite and the higher with massive granite boulders. The Otwa and Ikao tribes of the Ivbiosakon group, the North Ibie and Ukpila tribes of Etsako and the Somorika, Onumu, Ogbe, Ijaja, and Oso North-West Edo communities are situated in the higher, rocky areas, while the rest occupy lower-lying areas.

The territory of the Ivbiosakon lies in the south-west sector of the Division in the basins of the Owan and Edion Rivers. The Owan rises in the north-west and flows in a south-easterly direction to join the Osse (Ovia) River. The Edion rises on the northern slopes of the north-western watershed and flows east to the Niger. South and west of the road between Ozala and Uzeba (Iuleha tribe) the country is low-lying, thickly forested in the west but with the vegetation becoming sparser towards the east. The high plateau between the two main rivers is covered, for the most part, with orchard bush, but in its lower reaches the Edion flows through a well-watered, forested valley.

The Etsako area to the east is bounded by the Niger on the east and the boundary with the Kabba Province of Northern Nigeria on the north. The southern part of the area has some high forest which thins out towards the north, becoming orchard bush in the territory of the northern parts of Avianwu and Uzairhue tribes.

The main physical feature of the North-West Edo territory is a high, steep-sided, boulder-strewn ridge running from east to west, on the top of which stand a number of settlements. Other communities have descended to the lowlands during the period of British administration. To the south the country is mainly flat, though dissected by small steep-sided valleys. To the north, west, and east it is very undulating and there are some high hills with wooded and rocky slopes. Many communities lived on the tops of these hills during the period of Yoruba and Nupe incursions during the last century. The main stream in the area is the Onyame which flows from the north-east to the south-west corner of the area to join the Osse system. The natural vegetation is of the orchard bush type, thicker to the south and in the valleys but becoming sparser in the higher northern areas. Palm trees grow well in the south but become rarer to the north where corn beer replaces palm-wine as the main locally-produced alcoholic beverage.

The Ineme live in Niger riverside and lowland villages scattered through the Etsako and North-West Edo country.

Iron ore is found at Unguyami (Ukpila tribe) and mica is present in small quantities in the Otwa area of Ivbiosakon.

¹ Except where otherwise stated, the information in this section is derived entirely from government administrative sources, apart from a very brief reconnaissance by the author.

MAIN FEATURES OF ECONOMY²

AGRICULTURE

The soil of the area is reasonably fertile and there is enough land for the practice of shifting cultivation. According to one report yams and maize are cultivated on newly-cleared ground each year. The same land is sometimes planted with yams in the following year, with groundnuts and beans as the main subsidiary crops. It is then allowed to remain fallow for a period. Bridges³ gives the normal rotation as yams in the first year with corn and cassava in the second.

Yams are planted in the dry season in late December and in the unforested areas the yam heaps are capped with dry grass, apparently to retain moisture. A second planting takes place after the first rains in April and May. There are thus two harvest periods, the first about July and the second about November. Two crops of maize are grown and reaped between the yam harvests. Peas, beans, groundnuts, and other subsidiary crops are grown by the women. In the drier areas, approximately north of a line through Auchi, guinea-corn becomes a significant crop.

Oil-palms do well, especially in the south, and the preparation of oil and the marketing of kernels is carried on everywhere. In the south-western part of the Ivbiosakon area there are a considerable number of Yoruba, Benin, and Urhobo people engaged in the collection, preparation, and marketing of palm-products.

Other tree crops include kola, locust bean, and dica nut.

Cocoa seems not to have been grown on any scale before about 1935. Considerable amounts are now produced in parts of the Ivbiosakon area where the subsoil is laterite rather than Benin sand, and there are good crops at Okpe in the north-west.

Livestock. Dwarf cattle, which are immune from the tsetse fly, pasture near the settlements but are used only for meat. Goats, sheep, and fowls are ubiquitous. Domestic guinea-fowl and the Muscovy duck thrive, particularly in the drier parts.

Hunting. Buck are hunted everywhere. Elephant are numerous in the forested parts of Ivbiosakon.

Fishing is carried out in streams and rivers and especially by the riverside Ineme.

TRADE

Little information is available on the nature and value of trade. According to Temple⁴ crops are raised for local consumption only, but in fact food markets are held in most communities every four or eight days and a very large market has grown up at Jattu (Uzairhue tribe, Etsako), which attracts large numbers of traders from as far afield as Warri, Asaba, and Lagos who hire lorries to bring in trade goods and take away food for resale in the large towns. Yams, cassava, other foodstuffs, livestock and poultry, and raw cotton and locally woven cloth are among the chief exports.

CRAFTS

Spinning and weaving of locally grown cotton is carried out by the women throughout the area. The cloth is woven on simple upright looms, with heddles worked by hand, in strips of varying width. The indigenous cloth is either plain white or with a pattern of blue and white stripes and is of rather coarse texture. In the North-West Edo area, however, there has been a development of intricate pattern weaving in both local materials and imported silks and cottons. New patterns are constantly being evolved and a large proportion of the output is bought

² No detailed account of the economy of the Northern Edo is available, so that it is impossible to give more than a bare outline here.

³ See Bridges, 1939.

⁴ 1919, p. 249.

in the local markets by Ibo traders who export it to other parts of the country. This development is probably connected with a similar one at Okene, the main centre of the Igbira people immediately to the north.

Some pottery is made and the wood of the silk-cotton tree is carved. In the Etsako area the wood-carving is more akin to Ibo than to Benin and Yoruba styles.

Iron ore was formerly smelted at Unguyami (Ukpila tribe) and near Ineme-Ekpe. Many of the blacksmiths are Ineme people. Reports of brass-smithing by certain Ineme groups cannot be substantiated at present.

There are some interesting methods of storing food. In some places yams are stacked on platforms raised above the ground as protection against vermin and insects. Corn cobs are tied to high poles and such crops as beans are kept inside bales of interwoven grass which are suspended from trees.

House types vary in character but compounds are generally speaking larger than in Benin and Ishan villages. They are mud-built and thatched (except in the forest areas) with grass, large bundles of which can be seen in the villages in the dry season. Among the Etsako and in most Ivbiosakon villages the compounds are rectangular, with rooms ranged round a large open courtyard. There are usually entrances back and front and the latter is often sheltered by a verandah supported by mud pillars. In some houses there are additional courtyards. In many respects these compounds resemble the Yoruba rather than the Benin type.

At Ihievbe (Ivbiosakon area) the characteristic house consists of two long parallel blocks of rooms separated by a long narrow courtyard which may or may not be enclosed at the ends. The back block contains women's sleeping-rooms and kitchens.

Throughout the area there is a sprinkling of single and two-storeyed houses in which new materials such as concrete and corrugated metal roofing sheets have been used. In the North-West area, however, two-storeyed houses exist in which only local materials are used. The ceiling is made of wooden beams between and over which mud has been beaten down to form the upper floor. These houses often have verandahs and balconies supported by mud pillars. In some villages the outer walls of houses are painted with geometric and animal designs.

THE IVBIOSAKON TRIBES

LOCATION AND NOMENCLATURE

"Ivbiosakon" (*iviosakɔ*) is the name at present used to designate 17 formerly autonomous or semi-autonomous tribes located in the south-western part of Kukuruku Division. These are distinguishable from their Edo-speaking neighbours by common traditions of origin, dialect, and other cultural and social characteristics as well as a feeling of unity.¹ In general they have retained closer associations with Benin and a stronger allegiance to the *Oba* than other Northern Edo groups. The Ivbiosakon are bounded by the Benin and Ishan peoples on the south and south-east, the Etsako on the east, the North-West Edo on the north and the Yoruba of Owo Division on the west. There is considerable Yoruba cultural influence throughout the area. Yoruba is spoken everywhere as a second language, and is the medium of instruction in schools and adult education, and Yoruba styles of dress are very popular for both men and women.

The word "*iviosakɔ*" means "(the children of) those who file their teeth" and refers to a custom formerly common among the Northern Edo of filing the incisor teeth to a point. It is not clear whether or to whom this name may have been applied before it was adopted by the administration in the nineteen-thirties but it is apparently not regarded as satisfactory by all the peoples now included under it. The name of the Ora tribe was formerly extended by the administration to include some of the neighbouring Ivbiosakon tribes.

DEMOGRAPHY AND SETTLEMENT PATTERN

THE IVBIOSAKON TRIBES²

<i>Tribal group</i>	<i>Tribe</i>	<i>Villages</i>	<i>Approx. area, sq. m.</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Approx. density</i>
	Ora	8	112	8,489	76
	Usokha	1	23	1,852	86
	Iuleha	7	113	8,452	75
	Emai	8	106	5,683	54
	Ozala	1	18	2,138	119
	Otwa	12	50	8,965	183
	Ikao	3	4		
	Ivbiaro	4	19	8,269	35
	Uareke	4	61		
	Ihievbe	7	87		
	Era	4	70		
	Urole	3	29		
	Ohame	3	13	634	23
	Aroko	3	15	261	28
				818	55
	Ikhin	3	13	1,459	112
	Ake	3	16	949	95
	Iruoke	3	2	122	61
			745	48,100	64
	(Uhohe)			(3,930)	
	(Usagba)			(1,442)	

¹ The villages of Sobe (*Uhohe*) and Ijagba (*Usagba*) in the Owo Division of Ondo Province probably belong to this branch of the Edo-speaking peoples. They are said to speak a dialect closely related to that of Ora but there is no further information about them. The Iruhe village group in the extreme north of Benin Division has strong connections with the Southern Ivbiosakon people. On the other hand Otwa and Ikao, which are included in this section, seem, in their social structure, to be more akin to neighbouring North-West Edo groups though their sentiments and traditions identify them with the Ivbiosakon. The Igwe village

With the exception of Usokha and Ozala, which are single settlements, each of the Ivbiosakon tribes consists of from three to 12 compact village settlements. In some cases villages are so closely placed together as not to be distinguishable as separate entities, but generally the limits of the village community are easily discernible. Neighbouring villages of the same tribe may be several miles apart. Villages are divided into wards which may or may not be spatially separated from each other. At the present day the tendency is for houses to be strung out along one or two main streets.

As can be seen from the above table, the tribes vary in population size from less than 200 persons (in one case only) to more than 8,000. Villages vary from less than 100 to more than 2,000 persons, but the majority have less than 500.

According to the figures available the population density for the whole area is about 64 p.s.m. In general densities are highest in the south and south-west, falling away to the north and east but, if the figures are correct, Otwa and Ikao, in the valley of the Onyame (Edion) in the extreme north, have the highest density of all (183 p.s.m.). The majority of settlements appear to be within a short distance of, though never actually on the banks of, the main rivers. The lowest densities (Ivi-Ada-Obi, Urole, Ohame) are found mainly on the watershed between the two main river systems where the vegetation is less dense.

TRADITIONS OF ORIGIN AND HISTORY

ORIGINS

With few exceptions the Ivbiosakon tribes say their founders came from Benin, either directly or indirectly, in the sense that some of the tribes are said to be offshoots of others. There is little recorded evidence of an aboriginal population before the Benin incursions except in the case of Ivbiaro though Ikao and a section of Usokha claim ultimate Ife origins. It is difficult to date the alleged migrations from Benin but there is a strong belief that the founder of Ora was a son of Oba Ozolua who was reigning in 1485 and the founders of several other tribes are said to have come at the same time. On the other hand some Ora traditions of their foundation seem to accord more satisfactorily with a somewhat earlier period of Benin traditional history. For further details of individual tribes see below.

SUBSEQUENT RELATIONS WITH BENIN

In spite of the fact that their founders are said to have left Benin as a result of quarrels and banishments many of the Ivbiosakon tribes retained friendly contacts with Benin and some, at least, continued to pay tribute to the Oba. According to information collected from Uzeba (Iuleha tribe) in 1917 that village used to send 10 goats, 10 fowls and some game to the Oba each year. It was the general custom in the area to present the skins of all leopards that were killed to the Oba. At Uzeba a special house was set aside for the Oba's messengers and immediately before the British occupation one "Chief Obanyagboe" of Benin was responsible to the Oba for Uzeba. No Uzeba man should see the blood of a Benin man and if the former were to kill a Benin native he would pay four male and five female slaves in compensation. On the other hand Uzeba informants claimed that

group, included in this Survey among the North-West Edo, comes under the Ivbiosakon Federal Native Authority and probably has close connections with Otwa and Ikao.

^a The names of the tribal groups and tribes are spelt mainly as in administrative documents, except where the spelling differs too markedly from the vernacular pronunciation.

Population figures are from the 1952 Census and include strangers in the area who apparently number less than 2,000. The numbers of villages and the approximate areas of tribal territories are derived from administrative sources. The units treated as "towns" and "villages" in the Census bulletin do not always coincide with what have been called villages for the purpose of this report.

the town had successfully resisted raids made by Benin armies shortly before the Benin Expedition of 1897.³

Ora, in particular, retained strong sentiments of attachment to Benin. Benin and Ora traditions agree that the founder of Ora was of royal descent and some Ora people claim that on that account they were exempt from tribute. Amu,⁴ however, says that each year Ora used to send to the *Oba* a cow, a goat, and some iron objects which they obtained from the Ilemen (Ineme).

Unlike the Ishan the Ivbiosakon do not have hereditary chiefs recognized by the *Oba*. It is said that the founders of Ake, Iki, Aroko, and Iruoke obtained titles from the *Oba* but that these lapsed. Four or five generations ago an Ozala man received an *ada* (ceremonial sword) and the title *onogie* but the institution apparently carried little weight. At the time of the British occupation the son of the last *onogie* was too young to take the title.

In some tribes certain wards or villages claim seniority on the basis of connections with, or privileges conferred by Benin. One village of Otwa tribe claims that it is descended from a headman appointed by the *Oba* and therefore has the right to appoint the sub-tribal headman and at Ora the village of Evbiobe has a privileged position associated with possession of certain objects presented by the *Oba*.

The present *Oba* of Benin has in recent years awarded Benin titles in some Ivbiosakon sub-tribes as part of a plan to reunite the Edo-speaking peoples.

YORUBA AND NUPE RAIDS

During the latter half of the 19th century the whole area suffered raids by the Nupe and Ilorin Yoruba and parts of it were attacked by Ogedegbe of Ilesha. Many tribes were scattered or forced to move their settlements. The Ora villages, for example, moved seven miles up the Owan valley to their present sites and Emai moved into that valley from a site near Usokha. The Otwa people were scattered, seeking refuge at Owo, Agbede, and Irua. Some remained at Irua but the rest resettled their own land before the British arrived. Nearly all the Ivi-Ada-Obi villages were abandoned, the people seeking refuge in the rocky hills near the present site of Sebe-Ogbe. The Nupe conquered these and other northern Ivbiosakon tribes and planted representatives in them to collect regular tribute. Further south they were less successful. The Ivi-Imlon group formed a defensive alliance and avoided paying regular tribute and Iuleha apparently suffered less than the rest.

The Yoruba seem to have limited themselves to raiding, burning houses, and carrying off slaves and livestock. Otwa fought with Ibadan warriors against its traditional enemies at Okpe.

HISTORY UNDER BRITISH RULE

The whole area came under nominal British control in 1897 and was first administered from Ifon. A court was established at Afuze (Emai tribe) in 1905. The members appointed were usually young men who in certain cases have continued to exercise considerable authority.

In 1915 the Ifon District was included in the Ishan Division, but some tribes were transferred to the Kukuru Division on its formation in 1918. District Heads were appointed in 1920. Otwa, Ikao, Ake, Ikhin, and Aroko came under the *Olokpe* of Okpe and the Ivi-Ada-Obi group under the *Oba* of Agbede. The latter was an ally of the Nupe before British rule and had embraced Islam. He introduced the new religion into the Ivi-Ada-Obi group and replaced the original title-association system with individual Muslim titles. These titles, which have persisted until the present day were acquired by performing the ceremony of "tying

³ Chief Ezomo of Benin confirms that his father led an army against Uhobe, Uzagba, Uzeba, and other towns in this area at that time.

⁴ Amu. *The Ora history book*, p. 21.

turban" after paying fees to the District Head. Village headmen were appointed from among the title-holders.

After administrative enquiries in 1937 the Ivbioso tribes were all placed in the Kukuruku Division. Each became a separate Native Authority and together they form a federation for the purposes of a common Treasury and Appeal Court.

NOTES ON THE INDIVIDUAL TRIBES¹

1. Ora is said to be named after Eranrin-Ekpen or Ora-Ekpen the son of Ugwan, the banished son of *Oba* Ozolua of Benin. Each of the seven villages is descended from one or a pair of the 12 remembered sons of Ora-Ekpen. The hamlet Ebogwan is said to be descended from a priest, the guardian of Ugwan's shrine who, according to one version was a son of Ugwan born before the latter's banishment and according to another was appointed by one of Ora-Ekpen's sons. Amu says that Irhuckpen, now a part of Ekpoma chiefdom (Ishan) was founded by another son of Ora-Ekpen. He also claims that there are kinship ties with other Ivbioso tribes.

2. The Usokha people claim descent in part from Odion, the eldest son of the first *Oba* of Benin who was deprived of the succession, and in part from a Yoruba priest or "native doctor" who was banished from Benin. One family claims seniority in the tribe because it is descended from the Yoruba, who was a native of Ife.

3. The origin of Iuleha is traced to Usokha and Benin. One version states that the three major divisions of the tribe are descended from the three sons of a follower of the Yoruba priest who was banished to Usokha and that he was joined by Obazua, a follower of Ugwan from Benin. Amu says that Obazua was the founder of Iuleha and that his "children" form the three main segments.

4. Emai is said to have been founded by Ima (who fled from Benin after committing a murder) through his son Uzuambi. Another story makes Uzuambi a follower of Ugwan and Amu says that Ima was a maternal uncle of Ugwan. The major territorial segments of the tribe were founded by sons of Uzuambi (see diagram, p. 90).

5. At Ozala it is claimed that the founder, Uza, was a son of *Oba* Ozolua who was banished for committing adultery with his father's wife. Another version makes Uza the *Oba*'s servant; while at Ora it is claimed that he was a son of one of Ugwan's followers. Amu says he was a son of Ugwan who abandoned him because he was born feet first.

6. Each of the 12 villages of Otwa is said to be descended from one of the 12 companies of servants who accompanied Ugwan when he left Benin. They separated from Ora after a quarrel.

7. The Ikao people claim to be descended from an Ife man who first settled at Iduani, but they speak the same Edo dialect as Otwa. Another version states that some Ikao people once removed to Iduani.

8. The four villages of Ivbiaro are said to be descended from the four sons of a union between a supernatural being, Ada-Obi, and a mortal, Aro. The Uareke people, however, claim that they are a part of the same migration from Benin as themselves.

9. The two village-groups of Uareke claim to be descended from the two wives of Ake who fled from Benin.

10. Ihievbe is said to have been founded by Obo who was driven away from Benin. He was related to Uzuambi of Emai.

11. The Era people claim to be an offshoot of Ovbiomu village, Emai, which the founder left after a dispute. All the villages claim descent from him.

¹ Local traditions are given, for the most part, without comment. Order as in table, p. 84.

12. Urole is said to have been founded by a son of Obazua of Iuleha. He had three sons who founded the three villages which bear their names.

13. The Ohame people say their founder came from Ugo near Benin but the Usokha people say they came from Usokha.

14. and 15. Aroko and Ikhin say they were founded by two banished sons of an *Oba* of Benin. They settled first near Ifon and later in the Ora area. This may be another version of Ora traditions.

16. Ake is named after a Benin woman whose son committed adultery with the *Oba*'s wife thus forcing the family to flee.

17. Iruoke was founded by Oke who fled from Benin and settled between Aroko and Ikhin. They later fled from the Nupe to the Otwa Hills.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND POLITICAL SYSTEM

KINSHIP AND TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION

The 17 autonomous and semi-autonomous communities have usually been referred to as "clans." Each community names one or two founders from whom a large proportion of the population claims descent, and bonds between communities and between politico-territorial segments of the same community are frequently expressed in kinship terms. Not enough is known of the kinship structure, however, to justify the use of the term "clan" in its technical sense. For the purposes of this survey, therefore, the local community will be referred to as a "tribe".

Ozala, Usokha, Urole, Ohame, Aroko, Ikhin, Ake, and Iruoke consist of single, though sometimes scattered, villages, the remaining tribes of two or more villages. Villages are divided into territorial segments, here called "wards", which in turn contain one or more localized descent groups, together with dependents of members of these groups.

The "family" among the Ivbiosakon has been described as "a group worshipping the spirit of a common grandfather" who is represented by a carved staff (*ekute*).⁴ It seems probable that there is commonly an extended family whose core is a patrilineage⁵ of not more than three or four generations in depth and whose economic, jural, and spiritual head, the *adĩ ekute* ("elder of the staff") is the oldest surviving descendant in the male line from a common ancestor.

A number of localized descent groups between whose founders kinship ties are frequently traced are grouped together to form a ward.⁶ Wards are in some cases grouped within the village for political, judicial, and ritual purposes.

Generally the village names a founding ancestor, but in some cases it is evident that the people recognize themselves to be of diverse origins. In the sub-tribes which consist of more than one village fraternal links are claimed between village founders. The village allegedly descended from the senior brother may enjoy a superior status in certain political and ritual contexts. In some tribes villages are grouped on a geographical or putative kinship basis and these groups co-operate for certain political, judicial, and ceremonial purposes (see sections on title-associations and political organization and diagram p. 90 below).

Ties of common origin and kinship between founders are claimed between pairs and groups of tribes. A special link between Ora and Usokha is associated with the

⁴ Cf. Benin *uwurke*.

⁵ There is no evidence that the Ivbiosakon practise the alternative forms of marriage found among the Etsako.

⁶ That the ward cannot always be equated with a single descent group is shown by the fact that Anekho ward in Usokha has one descent group descended from the Ife founder and four others from the Benin founder (see p. 87 above). The same applies *a fortiori* to the kinship structure of villages and tribes.

legend that the mother of Ora-Ekpen was an Usokha woman. There are two groups of tribes, Ivbie-Imion, and Ivi-Ada-Obi, the member tribes of which are closely associated. The Ivbie-Imion tribes, between whom kinship ties are not claimed, formed a defensive alliance in the past and special relations exist between them in respect of their title-association (see p. 90 below). The Ivi-Ada-Obi group are united in worship of a common deity, Ada-Obi.

AGE-SET AND AGE-GRADE ORGANIZATION*

As among other sections of the Edo-speaking peoples age-stratification of the male population is an important element in the social structure. In most of the tribes new age-sets (*otu*) are formed every three years, but in Iuleha and Aroko the interval is five years, in Urole and Ikhin four years, in Ihievbe two years, while in Era a new set is said to be formed whenever enough youths reach the right age. The age at which a youth joins an age-set is reported to vary from about 15 to 23 years. Each set is given a name which, in the case of Ora, is said to be chosen from a traditional list.

As elsewhere the age-sets are grouped into three main grades. In Ora and some other tribes the lowest grade consists of the nine junior or working *otu* called *igbama* in Emai and Usokha and *otulesimi* ("the nine *otu*") in the Ivbie-Imion tribes. The nine sets are grouped into three companies of a fighting force, viz., *obodi*¹⁰ (those who fought on the right), *oxiade* (those who fought in the centre), and *agobo*¹⁰ (those who fought on the left). At Usokha, however, they are called *ainekwono*, *ohokade*, and *ohogbo*.

Among these tribes the senior *otu* of the three companies make up the middle age-grade or *otuleha* (the three *otu*). They were the leaders of the working *otu* and the executive arm of the elders' authority.

There are differences of detail in some of the other tribes. In Iuleha there were nine working *otu*, but the four senior ones took no part in day-to-day communal tasks; they acted as supervisors. The nine working *otu* of Ivbiaro are divided into three junior sets (*igbama*) and six senior sets (*ighele*). They are grouped into three companies as at Ora, each consisting of one *igbama* and two *ighele* sets. The nine warrior *otu* of Era are known as *ighele*. In Uareke there are seven working *otu* of which the three senior are called *igbama*; the name *ighele* here refers to the middle age-grade. In Ihievbe there are seven "working" *otu* (*ofiekpude*) and seven "warrior" *otu* (*ighele*). At Ozala the four junior sets are known as *egbolughele*, the next five as *ighele*, of which the three senior *otu* are called *otuleha*. This is reminiscent of the Ishan pattern.

The senior age-grade is everywhere called *edi*. In Ora the senior *otuleha* set is promoted to *edi* status every three years. Its members then become exempt from communal manual labour and assume a recognized voice in village affairs. There is no internal grouping of the *edi* but individuals are ranked according to age. Among the Ivi-Ada-Obi tribes there is a special grade *edima* of very old men who are no longer able to take part in village affairs but are still, nevertheless, worthy of respect; a man can never be regarded as *edima* while any person senior to him is still *edi*. At Uareke the seven oldest men—*edi ihir*—are accorded a special position in the village.

As elsewhere among the Edo-speaking peoples the age-set and age-grade organization appears to function on a village-wide basis. It is not clear whether there is any correspondence between the initiation and promotion cycles of different villages.

* The age-grade and age-set organization and the title system and political organization of Otwa and Ikao differ rather markedly from those of the rest of the Ivbiosakon tribes and will be dealt with separately below.

¹⁰ Literally *obodi* means right hand, *agobo* left hand, and *oxiade* the centre.

For some details of initiation and promotion ceremonies and the relation between age and political authority see below.

TITLE-ASSOCIATIONS

Like the Urhobo and some Etsako and Ibo communities the Ivbiosakon, with the exception of Otwa and Ikao, have well developed title-associations. In all tribes there are two associations, *ejerenaxwa* and *olokpa*. The people themselves claim that the titles were derived from Ife, but the general character of the institutions suggest affinities with the peoples mentioned above.¹¹

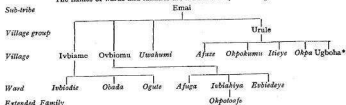
Membership of title-associations is achieved by the payment of fees which are shared by the existing members. The only available information concerning the nature and amount of these fees is a statement that in 1947 the *olokpa* title at Usokha cost about £15. No details are available of the ritual activities of the associations.

In most, if not all, tribes the *ejere* title ranks higher than the *olokpa* and generally a man must take the former before aspiring to the latter. In some tribes, however, it is reported that once a man joins one association he remains in it for life. In Ohame tribe the titles appear to be alternatives and it is said that an eldest son usually joins the association to which his father did not belong. Membership is theoretically open to any freeborn member of the tribe provided that certain conditions, which vary from community to community, are fulfilled. At Urole and Emai a man could not take the same title as his father or elder full brother during their lifetimes though he might take the alternative one. At Ozala a man could not take the *olokpa* title until all males in his "family" senior to himself had done so and he was debarred from taking the higher title while his father was alive or before his senior brother. Almost everywhere it was forbidden for two members of the same household to hold the same title. To-day most of these restrictions have disappeared and it is not unusual for a man to "purchase" a title for his infant son. Since precedence not only in the internal affairs of the associations but also in the community at large depends on order of entry into the associations the abandonment of the above qualifications may be correlated with modern economic and political changes. The general effect of the restrictions would be to limit membership of the title-associations and to ensure some equality in the representation of descent groups. The holding of a title is said, in some communities at least, not to exempt a man from the communal duties appropriate to his age-set.

TITLE-ASSOCIATION BRANCHES IN THE EMAI SUB-TRIBE

The title-association branches are italicized.

The names of wards and families are included only where significant.



* Ugboha is a village on the former site of Emai which contains people originating from all other villages. Ugboha men join title-associations in their villages of origin.

¹¹ *Ejere* is, in fact, the same as the Benin *egie* and the Ihan *eje*, meaning "title"; *axwa* is Edo for "big." The Ora legend of the origin of this title, as quoted by Amu (pp. 26-7) is as follows:—The son of the founder of Ora went to Ife and was given a "medi-

At Iuleha there is a third title-association, *ugbefo*, which co-opts its members from among those who hold the *ejerenxwa* title. A candidate pays fees and performs certain ceremonies and is then given a staff, *ukpaza*, as an insignia of his status.

The territorial segment for which a branch of a title-association is effective and within which it functions varies from community to community and cuts across other kinds of grouping. In Ora, each village has its own *ejerenxwa* branch and each ward or ward group its *okkpa* branch for the purpose of admitting new members, distributing fees, and determining status and appointments to offices in the village. In Era, while each village is a separate unit for the *okkpa* association there is only one *ejerenxwa* branch for the village as a whole. In Uareke three villages have joint associations while a fourth has its own. In Ihievbe three pairs of villages which are said to be descended from pairs of full brothers have joint branches while one village has a separate one. The diagram above illustrates the relation between title-groups and territorial segments in Emai where the position seems to be most complicated.

It is reported that in the Ivbie-Imion tribes title-holders from one tribe have the right to attend the meetings of the title-holders of the others, being accorded precedence equivalent to that which they hold in their own tribe. A new title-holder visits the *elefe* of the other tribes and makes presents to them.

Women are not admitted to the men's title-associations, but in some tribes they have their own society, *olusa*, composed of the senior wives of the members of the men's associations. At Emai, however, it is said to be the senior sisters rather than wives who are *olusa*. These women are accorded special respect and privileges and may have some functions in the settlement of disputes involving the morals of women.

During the period 1920 to 1936 the Ivi-Ada-Obi tribes were placed in the District of the Muslim *Oba* of Agbade who tried to destroy the indigenous title system and replace it by individual Muslim titles, purchased from himself and validated by the ceremony of "tying turban." The holders of these titles took over the political functions formerly performed by title-association members.

The significance of the title-associations in the political organization is discussed below.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Four main factors govern the ascription of statuses conferring political authority:—

1. Relative chronological age.

2. Title status. It may, on the one hand, be the mere possession of a title which is important as when the oldest man is regarded as the head of a territorial segment provided he has a title; in some tribes an *odis* who has no title receives the oppo-

cise " which he was told would profit him (*ojere re*). He misunderstood the Yoruba words and when he returned said the medicine would make him *ejere*. He shared it with his brothers one of whom, the founder of Evbiobe village, gave some to his relative from Ozala. The *ejerenxwa* title-holders of Evbiobe are said to wear the small cloth that is the usual insignia of this status in Ora as a sign that they gave away part of the honour. People from Uzeba came seeking the medicine but could only get a thread from the cloth in which it was wrapped. This they dipped into the medicine left on the grinding stone; to-day the *elefe* (title-holders) of Uzeba (Iuleha tribe) distinguish themselves by wearing a thread. Finally the Emai people came and took away the grinding stone itself which they still retain.

The Ozala people agree that they obtained the title from Ora but not from Evbiobe. They got it through an Ozala woman married to an Ora man. Emai claim to have had the title direct from Ife.

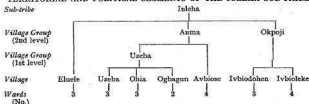
The word *okkpa* may derive from the Yoruba *okkpa* meaning king's staff-bearer, retainer, policeman.

brious epithet, *ozo*. On the other hand, within the body of title-holders political offices may be ascribed on the basis of "title age", i.e., the order in which the title-holders have become members of the association.

3. Inequalities of precedence and privilege among territorial segments of the same order. In some wards the privilege of supplying the ward headman is reserved to one or more specified descent groups; in some villages certain wards are excluded from the right to provide a village headman and in some tribes the tribal headman must come from one or more specified wards or villages. These inequalities are attributed to various factors—priority of settlement, seniority relations between founders, special connections with Benin or Ife, etc.

4. The *uko* system. *Uko* is the usual Edo word for "messenger". Among the Ivbiosakon it carries the meaning "deputy" and refers to the delegation of powers by one individual or group to another individual or group. The nominal head of a territorial unit may delegate the right to summon meetings and preside over them to another individual. The latter normally comes from a different segment of the same unit and in some cases the segment from which he must come is specified. At the group level this delegation of powers is normal. That is, the segment which is privileged to appoint persons in authority always delegates that authority to another specified segment or one of a number of such segments. Examples will be given below.

TERRITORIAL AND POLITICAL SEGMENTS OF THE IULEHA SUB-TRIBE



As stated above a tribe consists of one or a number of villages which may be grouped at an intermediate level. The diagram illustrates the territorial and political structure of Iuleha, one of the more complicated tribes. Councils or meetings take place at each of the levels indicated—ward, village, village group (at two levels), and tribe. They are summoned and presided over by specified persons, usually at their own houses, and they direct the political and judicial affairs of the territorial segment for which they are effective.

A council at any level is normally made up of the *edif* and *eleje* of the segment, together, sometimes, with the middle age-grade—*otuleha* or *ighele*—who, however, act mainly as messengers and in other executive capacities. In a majority of communities ward councils are said to be summoned by the oldest man, *adiwere*. In other tribes it is the senior title-holder of the ward as a whole or of one or more specified lineages who performs this function. In some cases the senior title-holder is recognized as the *uko* of the *adiwere*.

Village councils are made up of the joint ward councils. In Emai, Ihievbe, and Uareke the village headman is normally the oldest man either in the village as a whole or in a privileged ward or group of wards. In Ovbiomu village, Emai, however, the village headmanship is said to be divided; the *adiwere* of one ward is the priest of the village deity and it is he who summons all meetings concerned with internal and ritual affairs. The *adiwere* of another ward, however, is the village

headman *vis-à-vis* other villages and summons all meetings concerned with external affairs. In another Emai village the *adiwere* of one ward acts as the *uko* of the *adiwere* of another.

In other sub-tribes title status is more significant at the village level. The village headman in Ora villages is the senior of two *adi-urukpa*, so called because they are in possession of ritual staffs or *urukpa*. These two staffs are given to the oldest (by actual age) members of the *ejerenxwa* association in the village or in one or more specified wards. In Oke village, for example, there are now four wards, Igbale, Osi, Okpokumu, and Okpotole. Originally there were only two, Igbale and Osi, but the latter was later joined by the founders of the remaining two who came from Ishan. Osi, Okpokumu, and Okpotole now form a ward group, Iybiebiolue. The two *urukpa* in Oke are held by the oldest *eleje* in Igbale and Iybiebiolue respectively. The village of Evbiobe has two wards each of which provides an *adi-urukpa*. One of these is always regarded as the senior, but the other is his *uko* and the *uko* of the tribal headman of Ora.

In the villages of Era tribe the *adiwere* of the village or of one or more specified wards is the nominal village headman, but in actual fact authority rests largely in the hands of his *uko*, the senior *eleje*. In Iuleha, where the title factor overrides the age factor more completely, the senior *eleje* of the village or of one or more specified wards is the recognized headman though in at least one case he has an *uko* from another ward. In most of the Ivbiaro villages the *odeadi*, the senior *eleje* of the whole village, is said to be the headman, but he appoints a titled *uko* from another ward.

In the single-village tribes the village council is also the tribal council. The tribal head of Usokha is, in theory, the oldest man, but his functions are performed by the senior *eleje* of one group of extended families in one ward. At Ozala the oldest man is the tribal head, while among the Ivbie-Imion tribes the headman is the senior title-holder of the tribe or of a specified ward.

In multi-village tribes the village councils join together to form a tribal council, though in some cases only the title-holders are said to attend. The same factors affect the ascription of officers as at lower levels. At Emai the *adiwere* of Uwahumi village is nominal tribal head, but in practice his authority is delegated to an *uko* from Afuze village, probably the *adiwere*. At Ora the senior *adi-urukpa* of Ohia village is the headman but has as his *uko* the *adi-urukpa* of the Idumu ward of Evbiobe, who calls the meetings and announces the agenda before the headman speaks.

In the Ivi-Ada-Obi tribes, from 1920 to 1936, the holders of Muslim titles formed the village and tribal councils, one of them being appointed headman by the *Oba* of Agbede.

Women have little formal part to play in the political organization. A woman whose opinion is respected or whose advice or testimony is required may, however, be asked to speak at a meeting.

LAW AND ORDER

All the councils described above formerly acted as judicial bodies in the appropriate contexts, that is in respect of offences committed internally by, and disputes between, members of the territorial segments for which they were effective.

The most serious criminal cases could be settled only by the tribal council or, in the case of the Ivbie-Imion group, the tribal group council. Such offences as homicide, robbery-with-violence, witchcraft, slave-dealing, and child-stealing within the tribe were regarded as offences against the tribe and should be dealt with only by the tribal council meeting at the village where the crime was committed. None

of the Ivbie-Imion tribes could pronounce the death sentence on one of their members without calling in the other tribes. In this case the judicial body consisted of the title-holders of all the tribes with the *otuleha* grade as the executive.

Minor criminal cases and civil disputes might be settled at any level. A family head would adjudicate between members of his own family and two families of the same ward would attempt to reach agreement in the case of a dispute between their members. If they failed to do so the village council might be asked to make a decision. Failure to settle disputes at the village or village-group level would result in a case being taken before the tribal council. The heads of age-sets or age-grades settled disputes between their members and punished minor breaches of age-set or grade regulations.

Except in the Ivbie-Imion group self-help was the only sanction in disputes between members of different tribes though peaceable settlements might be attempted.

The *otuleha* or middle age-grade summoned offenders to appear before the councils and carried out the latter's decisions. In minor matters they may have had some summary jurisdiction. At Ozala it is reported that they could punish petty thieves or assaulters, probably by forcing them to return stolen goods, or pay compensation plus a small fine which they shared among themselves. The matter would have to be reported to the *adibwere* of the offender's ward, however.

There is no information as to the procedure adopted for judging cases, though oaths and ordeals seem commonly to have been resorted to where evidence was lacking or contradictory.

Murder within the tribe was punishable by death, though whether the sentence was carried out seems to have depended upon the relative status of the murderer and his victim and of their kinship groups. A rich man might be able to buy himself off by paying compensation. On the other hand vengeance was sometimes resorted to. At Uzeba the death sentence was carried out by hanging in the market place, though it might be avoided by giving a substitute to the bereaved group. Man-slaughter was compensated at Ora by the transfer of two persons from the murderer's descent group to that of his victim. Witchcraft guilt was determined by the sassawood ordeal, which carried its own penalty.

For lesser offences and in civil disputes compensation and fining were the principles underlying settlement. At Uzeba a stolen goat would have to be returned, together with another goat and a fine.¹² Fines were shared by the judicial body. The only other type of punishment which is recorded is the destruction of a man's house and crops for murder at Ora and of the house of an Uzeba man who assaulted a girl.¹³

Enforcement of judgments was carried out, where necessary, by the *otuleha* (or equivalent group) who were empowered to seize property of the offender or of members of his ward. At Emai, however, it is reported that these powers were granted to the victim of the offence who might be allowed to seize the property belonging to the offender or his family.

OTWA

Age-grades and Age-sets

The age-grade and age-set organization at Otwa differs markedly from that of the other Ivbiosakon tribes and has many features in common with that of some neighbouring North-West Edo communities. A series of 11 age-grades is described through which pass age-sets formed, in the first place, every five years.

¹² Thomas, 1910 (I), pt. I, p. 106.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

	Name of grade	Years spent in grade	Approximate age at joining
"Working" grades	Ewuawavia	5	15 to 20
	Egede	5	20 to 25
	Ikansilo	5	25 to 30
	Igo	5	30 to 35
"Title" grades ¹⁴	Izogan	5	35 to 40
	Eghibia	5 or 10	40 to 45
	Otunesa	10	45 to 55
"Ruling" grades	Ikerevbo	9	55 to 65
	Imorewe	3	64 to 74
	Ikeregoki	12	67 to 77
Elders	Ekpase		79 to 89

A group of youths is initiated into the *ewuawavia* grade every five years. At the same time each of the previously formed sets up to and including that currently occupying the *izogan* grade moves up one grade. At the *eghibia* level two sets fuse, the senior one remaining in that grade for 10 years. All sets remain in the *otunesa* grade for 10 years.

Each set occupies the *ikeregoki* grade—the ruling grade proper—for 12 years. During the last three years it is assisted in governmental functions by the members of the concurrent *ikerevbo* grade who then become known as *imorewe*. The latter might perhaps be better regarded as a sub-grade of *ikeregoki*, made up of members of the succeeding set who have begun to perform *ikeregoki* functions; it is in existence for only three out of every 12 years. The *ekpase* are the very old men who have retired from active life but are still treated with great respect and formally consulted on all important matters.

Political Organization

The political organization of Otwa hinges on the fact that the members of the *ikeregoki* grade in any territorial segment are regarded as the rulers of that segment. The table above shows that they are old men and it may be for this reason that the succeeding set joins them for their last three years of office.

At the village level councils consist of the members of the "ruling" grades, the *ikeregoki* delegating considerable powers to the *ikerevbo*. At the end of their period of office the *ikeregoki* appoint a new village head (*onomolen*) from among the in-coming *ikeregoki*. He must be from the senior of the two sets which earlier fused at the *eghibia* level. The *onomolen* appoints a deputy (*ukemi*) who will take over from him should he die during his term of office.

The 12 Otwa villages are divided into six pairs, each pair holding joint meetings attended by the two *onomolen* and *ukemi* and the members of the ruling grades. Isokha village of the Isokha-Igbira group holds meetings with Olila-Orake because they were the only three villages left when Otwa was scattered by the Nupe. The two villages in each group normally take turns to supply the group *onomolen* who appoints an *ukemi* from the other village.

A tribal headman (*ovie*) is appointed by the retiring *ikeregoki* grade in consultation with the incoming *ikeregoki* and he too holds office for 12 years. To-day tribal headmanship rotates through the villages though there is some indication that in the past Oluma village alone may have supplied the *ovie*, and the induction ceremonies are still held there. Tribal meetings are summoned by the *ovie* through his *ukemi* (who must be from another village) to the market place at Oluma. They are composed of members of the ruling grades.

All the villages are ranked in order of seniority for purposes of sharing any benefits, the first five villages coming from different village groups.

¹⁴ Not enough information is available about methods of and qualifications for promotion to decide whether, in fact, this system does not include title-association as well as age-grade elements. Cf. some North-West Edo communities described below.

Law and Order

Age-grades have the right to impose fines of livestock on their own members who do not play their part in age-grade activities. The *otunesa* (senior title grade) perform the functions of the *otuleha* among other Iybiosakon tribes and can levy fines for petty offences. The *ikerevbo* had similar rights in respect of more serious delicts. The most serious offences which were the same as in the rest of Iybiosakon were settled by the tribal council.

IKAO

The age-grade system of Ikao is similar to that of Otwa, but the fusing of two sets occurs at the fifth rather than the sixth level. There is no reference to an *imorewe* grade and once a man becomes *ikeregoki* he stays in that grade for life.

The political organization differs from that of Otwa in that there are two hereditary titles,¹⁵ *Ikao* and *Olotu*, and three non-hereditary titles (*oviehego*), one held in each of the three villages. The latter are appointed by the *Ikao* on the recommendation of the members of the village concerned, and the candidate must have reached at least the *enezogan* grade, which is equivalent to *izogan* at Otwa.

The *Ikao* is the head of Uhurele village, the title normally passing from father to a son who must be the son of a woman of a different tribe. If no such son is available who has reached the *enezogan* grade a regent is appointed until his death when the title reverts to the original line. Village meetings at Uhurele consist of the two senior age-grades summoned and presided over by the *Ikao*.

In Uso village meetings are summoned by the headman, *Olotu*. The holder of the *oviehego* title (here called *oviakepe*) can attend meetings even though not a member of these grades.

In Ijegbe village the *oviehego* title-holder (*oviamolede*) is the village head.

Tribal meetings are summoned by the *Ikao* to his own village.

*LAND TENURE*¹⁶

According to the information available the village is the smallest land-holding unit, individuals and families retaining rights in land only so long as it is under cultivation. Land litigation is very rare, but disputes over the ownership of permanent crops, especially cocoa, are becoming more frequent. Land under permanent crops remains under the planter's control. The crops themselves may be sold, pledged, or mortgaged but the land on which they grow is theoretically inalienable. Some attempt has been made at Ora to limit the planting of rubber and cocoa to certain restricted areas.

Among the important tree-crops coconut and kola-nut trees are usually individual property, while oil-palms are generally communal village property. Privately planted oil-palms, however, belong to the planter at Otwa.

INHERITANCE

According to Thomas¹⁷ a man's sons fall into three categories in respect of inheritance of his property:—(1) The first-born surviving son; (2) the senior sons of other wives and (3) other sons.

The deceased's house is normally inherited by the first-born son who, however, in some tribes is said not to have the right to evict his brothers, who may bring their wives to live with them in the house. Frequently brothers continue to farm together after their father's death.

Widows may be inherited by the sons, brothers, or father's brothers of the deceased. The eldest son has first choice, though in some cases the wives themselves are said to have considerable freedom in choosing their inheritor.

¹⁵ Ikao seems to have much in common with Okpe, Oloomo and Ijaja among the North-West Edo.

¹⁶ See Rowling, 1948.

¹⁷ Thomas, 1910 (1), sect. iv.

The farm and other property are shared out between the eldest sons of the deceased's wives, who may, in turn, allocate portions to their younger brothers. In some cases the first-born son gets the first and biggest share while in others there is equal division. At Afuze (Emai tribe) a daughter by a wife without sons may be allowed a share and daughters usually inherit yams, cloth, beads, etc., when there are no male heirs. At Uareke brothers, half-brothers, and the "family head" may claim a share of movable property, but at Aroko (as in Benin) a man may not inherit from his junior brother though his son may do so in the absence of a closer heir. The mother of the first-born son may look after the property of an absent son or the latter may receive something in compensation for it.

At Ivbiaro wives are divided first, then movables, then trees and farms. The yams are tied into "ropes," two of which go to the father's brother(s). The rest are to be divided by the sons or kept as common property if they are farming together.

Thomas reports that when, at Ivbiaro, a person is transferred from one family to another as the result of a murder he inherits what the dead person would have received. Posthumous sons born before the property is divided may receive a share, except, apparently, at Uareke. Illegitimate sons may be formally recognized as heirs.

A deceased woman's property is inherited by her sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters, the senior son taking control, if old enough. At Era, however her brothers are said to claim all she has made with her own hands. At Ivbiaro, on the other hand, in the absence of any children the husband may claim all property that she did not bring from her father's house.

It is common for a man or woman without children to adopt a brother's or sister's child as an heir.

THE LIFE CYCLE

BIRTH

Customs relating to the birth of children vary considerably from tribe to tribe.¹⁸ There seems to be no stipulation as to where a birth should occur, but special care is taken in the disposal of the placenta, the child's end of the umbilical cord, and the first hairs shaved from its head. At Ivbiaro and Uareke the child is periodically removed from the house during the first three months while the house is swept and rubbed down.

Parturition takes place in a squatting position at Otwa. At Uareke the mother is allowed to leave the house after seven days but should not work on the farm for a year. At Ivbiaro suckling is said to continue until the mother bears a second child, though after five months the child begins to take ordinary food.

PUBERTY AND ADOLESCENCE

For girls clitoridectomy is performed after puberty with considerable ceremony, but no detailed information is available. Boys undergo initiation ceremonies of varying elaboration in connection with admission to age-sets. These rites generally involve the tying of a cloth on the initiate,¹⁹ but at Ihievbe and Era this apparently takes place on admission to warrior status.

MARRIAGE, EXOGAMY, AND DIVORCE

There is no evidence that the Ivbiosakon practise the alternative forms of marriage found elsewhere among the Northern Edo.²⁰ It is reported that among all

¹⁸ See Thomas, 1922, pp. 250-8.

¹⁹ Cf. the *ihue* ceremony in Ishan.

²⁰ An administrative report of 1914, however, states that at Otwa in marriages within the tribe the children remain in the household and family of their mothers' parents. But Otwa cannot be regarded as typically Ivbiosakon.

the Edo-speaking peoples a man secures a wife by making payments to, and performing services for, her father. At Ora in 1914 the bride-price was fixed at £12—£10 to the father and £2 to the mother. It was said that prior to British rule the corresponding figures were the equivalents of 36s. and 8s. in cowries. At Evbiobe part of the bride-price might not be paid until after the bride had joined her husband.

Service takes the form of assistance on the father-in-law's farm. It may begin when the girl is still very young and continue after the marriage has been completed.

If a girl's father is dead the right to give her in marriage passes to her own full brother or, if none is old enough, to her father's brother.

There is little information concerning the range of marriage prohibitions. At Emai, according to one report, the two villages Afuze and Okpokumu together make up one exogamous unit. The village of Itieye forms another (see diagram, p. 90).

It is said that at Uzeba the only way for a woman to obtain a divorce in the past was to acquire a lover who was willing, on the orders of the village headman, to refund the bride-price to the husband. The woman forfeited any property left in her husband's house. At Ora the tribal headman could set a woman free, but if she had children they remained with their father, no bride-price being refunded.

At Ora a woman who commits adultery should report to her husband that "some people hold my cloth". She should provide a cock for her husband to sacrifice before beginning to cook for him again.

DEATH AND MORTUARY RITES

Thomas has described mortuary rites among some Ivbiosakon tribes in considerable detail.²¹ Though they vary in detail from tribe to tribe they have certain elements in common. The senior son of the deceased is normally the chief mourner and officiant, and the rites for adults with children invariably involve the sacrifice of goats and fowls. All communities apparently set aside special burial grounds for different categories of persons—chiefs, young men, women, etc. Unmarried people and people without children are usually buried without ceremony.

On the death of the "head chief" of Uzeba (Iuleha tribe) seven cows should be killed immediately inside his house. No lamenting is permitted until his successor has been chosen. The body is placed on a platform surmounting two low walls which is roofed over, and remains there until preparations for the mortuary rites have been completed. The corpse is then washed in gin and a temporary grave is opened. The eldest son of the deceased sacrifices a cow, a cock, a ram, and a goat to the right hand of the deceased, while the other participants pray:—"We kill for you; look out for us and do not let us die young. You can help your son to get another son."

When the successor has been chosen the grave is opened and the corpse placed on a bed with mats, cloths, etc., and a similar sacrifice is performed. Sacrifices are then made every third day on the threshold of the deceased's house until the ninth day when the nine "working" age-sets of the town dig the permanent grave. Before the corpse is finally buried it is laid out in the street where a cow and a dog are sacrificed, the latter to the right hand of the deceased. The widows are made to cover their faces and each swears to hand over all the property of her husband which is in her care to the senior son. The body is then carried to the grave where a he-goat is sacrificed to its feet before burial.

The burial ground, which is on the site of a former village, is divided into four sections, for head chiefs, two other ranks of chiefs (presumably members of the title-associations), and women chiefs. Other people are buried along the road leading to this site.

²¹ Thomas, 1920 (2), pp. 19, 20, 21, 24, 28, 29-32; 1910 (1), pt. I.

At Sabongida (Ora) when the head chief dies all the people meet outside, ringing bells, firing guns, throwing cowries, dancing, and singing. The sons of the deceased carry *ada* (ceremonial swords) round the town, lamenting their father. At dawn the body is taken outside and a cow is killed. A special *osa* carry the body to the grave while the rest of the people dance behind. After the burial there is mourning for seven days. Then the people shave their heads and the family assemble to divide the property.

In the same place ordinary people are buried in the bush after being washed and sewn up in a cloth. A fowl is killed for the deceased's hand and fufu is offered to the feet. Should a man die away from home chalk is taken and his name called out on the road along which he departed. The chalk is then buried with the usual ceremony.

MAGIC AND RELIGION

RELIGION

According to Thomas ²² the high god, *Osa*, is recognized and worshipped by the Ivblosakon as in Benin. *Esu* is found everywhere in the guise of a mud or wooden figure placed outside the doors of houses to keep out misfortunes. In folk-tales he is the door-keeper of *erivi*, the land of the spirits.

Ancestor worship is practised within lineages of rather shallow depth, the ancestors being represented by carved staffs as at Benin. The staff is kept by the senior member of the lineage.

Shrines dedicated to the founders are found in many communities. Thomas reports that in each ward of Uzeba (Iuleha tribe) there is a shrine to Obazua, the joint founder of the tribe. The shrine is covered by a cloth, the lifting of which is strictly forbidden. At Ora there are shrines to the founder, Ugwan, and his son, Ora-Ekpen. The first is at the hamlet Ebogwan, whose hereditary headman is its priest. The mother of Ora-Ekpen is said to have been an Usokha woman and therefore, according to one report, the Ora-Ekpen shrine must always have an Usokha woman as its priestess.

The Ivi-Ada-Obi tribes are named after Ada-Obi the deity which they have in common. According to one belief Ada-Obi was the supernatural ancestress of the Ivbiaro people, but another version is that the worship of Ada-Obi and Akezi was derived from Emai through a kinship connection. The main Ada-Obi shrine is at Isogben village, Ivbiaro, and people from the other three tribes come there to worship. Emai has its own Ada-Obi shrine. Albinos apparently had a special function in the worship of Akezi at Uareke; neighbouring tribes are said to have sent their albinos there.

According to Thomas, the *ovia* cult is practised at Otwa, the men who take part being secluded for a month, during which they must refrain from sexual intercourse.

At Emai and Iuleha there are reported to be annual festivals lasting seven days in honour of mothers who have born male children during the previous year.

Both Christianity and Islam have many converts in the area.

WITCHCRAFT

Witchcraft beliefs appear to follow the Benin pattern. The Ivblosakon area has been noted in the past for extensive outbreaks of sassafras poisoning in connection with witchcraft accusations. At Otwa whole families have been known to take sassafras when one of their members has been accused.

²² 1910 (1), pt. II, sect. II.

THE ETSAKO TRIBES

LOCATION AND NOMENCLATURE

For the purposes of this survey the word "Etsako" is used to describe nine Edo-speaking tribes inhabiting the eastern side of the Kukuruku Division.¹ Each tribe is autonomous, but all are connected by common traditions of origin from Benin. They speak closely related dialects and have a common culture and a feeling of unity which is said to be expressed by a taboo on blood-letting between at least some of the tribes.

"Etsako", viz., "those who file their teeth", has the same meaning as "Ivbiosakon" (see p. 84 above) and is of the same origin. It is probably most appropriately applied to Uzairhue, Auchi, Ibie, Avianwu, Ekperi, and Uwepa-Uwano, and possibly to Ukpila and Aviele, but the administration has extended its use to include some other groups.

The dialects of at least some of the Etsako tribes are sharply distinguishable from neighbouring Edo dialects by the absence of nasal vowels and the possession of certain consonants and consonant-combinations. There appears, however, to be no rigid linguistic boundary between Etsako as a whole and neighbouring Edo-speaking peoples. Ukpila dialect, for example, seems to have much in common with that of Ososo (North-West Edo).

DEMOGRAPHY AND SETTLEMENT PATTERN

<i>Tribe</i>	<i>Villages or hamlets</i>	<i>Population</i> ²
1. Uzairhue	17	18,043
2. Auchi	4	6,410
3. North Ibie	4	8,245
4. South Ibie	5	4,219
5. Avianwu	4	8,302
6. Ekperi	17	6,171
7. Uwepa-Uwano	29(?)	16,660
8. Ukpila	6	14,329
9. Aviele	9	5,680
		<hr/> 88,019 <hr/>

The Etsako tribes vary in population from less than 4,500 to more than 18,000 persons. Each tribe consists of a number of compact village settlements and in the Auchi tribe the four villages are so closely placed as to form a single community on the ground. On the other hand, neighbouring villages in some tribes are several miles apart. The multiplicity of settlement in the relatively small Ekperi tribe is due to scattering, during the last century, by Nupe raiders (see p. 101 below). Villages range in size from less than 100 to more than 5,000 persons. The majority have less than 1,000, but five of the six villages of Ukpila, for example, have more than 2,000 persons. The marked compactness here may be related to the rocky and precipitous terrain. Villages are on the whole much larger in the Etsako than in the Ivbiosakon area. They are divided into wards which may be spatially separate.

¹ Three other groups, Anwain, Upagbe, and Southern Ineme, are included in the present-day Etsako Federal Native Authority but the first two are here included with the Ishan people with whom they seem to have more in common and the last is described with the rest of the Ineme below.

² The population figures, which include strangers, are from the 1952 Census Bulletin. The numbers of villages and hamlets are from other administrative sources and do not necessarily coincide with what were taken to be village units for census purposes.

TRADITIONS OF ORIGIN AND HISTORY

ORIGINS

All the Etsako tribes claim that their founders came from Benin, though in the case of Ukpila, Ibie, and Uwepa-Uwano there is some evidence of absorption of aboriginal elements (*ugbams*).² The founders of Uzairhue, Ibie, Avianwu, Ekperi, and Uwepa-Uwano are said to have formed part of a single migration and to have settled, originally, in the Uzairhue area. Traditions refer to a period of oppression and civil war in Benin which led to an exodus of refugees to the north. The founders of Ukpila and Aviele, too, are said to have come from Benin, the latter in the time of *Oba* Ozolua (cf. Ora traditions, p. 87 above).

After an early period in which they sent the skins of all leopards killed to the *Oba* the Etsako people seem to have broken off close contacts with Benin and to have been outside the range of Benin armies.

NUPE DOMINATION

During the latter half of the 19th century the area was invaded by the Nupe. Some tribes resisted—Uwepa and Uwano apparently forming an alliance—some scattered and others submitted. All eventually paid tribute, in the form of slaves, to the Emir of Bida and Nupe agents were posted in some Etsako settlements. The rulers of Aviele entered into friendly relations with the Nupe and supplied them with slaves from the surrounding tribes. Nupe titles were introduced there and eventually replaced those of Benin origin. But the tribal head who died in 1895 adopted the Yoruba title, *Oba* and his son, Momodu, who succeeded him, forcibly converted his people to Islam, ordering them to destroy their pagan shrines. A Nupe "chief," Umoru, settled at Uzairhue and compelled the people there to provide 20 slaves a year for Bida. He made a descendant of the tribal founder the head of Uzairhue and the North-West Edo villages, Ate and Ikpeshi; his task was to supervise the collection of tribute, in return for which he received presents from Bida.

According to Temple Kukuruku slaves who proved trustworthy were sent back to their homes as Nupe agents to assist in the collection of tribute and its dispatch to Bida, and were rewarded with cloths and other presents. The Nupe, apart from tribute, exacted death duties on the estates of dead "chiefs."

THE MODERN PERIOD

British officials first penetrated the southern part of Etsako country from Idah in 1904. A series of expeditions followed and the area was first administered from Iddo (Ukpila) and later from Fuga (Avianwu) and Auchi. It became part of the Kukuruku Division in 1918. In the early days of the Administration the suzerainty of the *Oba* of Agbede (Aviele) was recognized over a number of Etsako, Iybiosakon, and North-West Edo communities. After the death of *Oba* Momodu in 1910 the power of Agbede was greatly reduced although the selection of the *Oba* of Agbede as District Head from 1920 to 1936 encouraged Agbede claims to power.

In 1938 all the tribes included in this section, together with Anwain, Ujagbe, Southern Ineme, and Northern Ifeku were included in an Etsako Federal Native Authority.

NOTES ON THE INDIVIDUAL TRIBES

1. Uzairhue is said to have been founded by a Benin man of that name. Eight of his sons founded villages and further segmentation produced the remaining settlements.

2. The Auchi people live in four villages grouped together at the foot of a hill.

² Temple, p. 247.

3. The ancestors of the Ibie people first settled in the Uzairhue area. They later split into two sections, one of which went east and became the South Ibie tribe. During the Nupe incursions two groups fled to the south, one to form Eware village, Anwain, and the other Akua village, Irua.

4. The second section of the Ibie people, led by the founder's son, moved to the north. The four villages claim to be descended from Ogogo's four sons, after whom they are named.

5. Anwui, the founder, fled from Benin with ancestors of other Etsako peoples and settled in the Uzairhue area before moving to the present site. The four villages are said to have been founded by his "sons."

6. Before the Nupe invasion the Ekperi people occupied two villages, Ughekpe and Imakigbe. Many fled from the Nupe south to the forest area and there are now 17 settlements, many of which contain elements from a variety of the original extended families, wards, and villages.

7. The founders of Uwepa-Uwano, after splitting off from the original migration to the Uzairhue area, settled in the fertile land close to the river. They later divided into two sections, the Uwepa moving south.

8. The Ukpila people represent a separate migration from Benin—from the Sapele area according to Temple³—the immigrants settling down with some people who were already on the site of Ogute. The present settlement of Imiekwi is said to be largely descended from this aboriginal group. Ukpila's descendants proliferated into the present-day settlements, one of which is said to be formed from the descendants of a daughter of Ukpila.

9. The founder of Aviele is said to have left Benin in the time of Oba Ozolua (c. 1485) and to have settled north of the Orie River. His followers were later attacked by the Ibie and the tribal headman moved south to the present site of Agbede. The Oba of Agbede achieved considerable local importance during the Nupe period and the early years of British rule.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND POLITICAL SYSTEM

KINSHIP AND TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION

The tribe is a territorial group whose members name a common founder and relations between segments within the tribe are frequently expressed in kinship terms. There is too little information about the internal structure and composition of the tribe, however, to decide whether the terms "clan" or "maximal lineage" could be correctly applied to them. Each tribe contains a number of compact villages, comprising two or more wards, which break down into "extended families".

There is no direct information on the composition of the "extended family," but the presence of alternative forms of marriage which involve different patterns of residence and affiliations (see p. 108 below) suggests that in some cases its core may be a bilateral rather than a unilineal descent group. This argument applies *a fortiori* to relations between descent groups and territorial units of a higher order.

The ward (*ede*) consists of a number of contiguous descent groups which commonly claim descent from a single founder. It seems formerly to have been an exogamous unit, but marriage prohibitions have recently tended to break down, particularly in those areas most affected by Islam.

The village is a collection of wards which, in most cases, recognize a legendary common founding ancestor. It is not always possible, however, to identify either ward or village with a single descent group; the Afatevbeda ward of Agbede (Aviele), for example, is of very heterogeneous composition. In some Avianwu, Ibie, and Uwepa-Uwano villages certain wards claim seniority over others and the right to appoint the village headman.

³ 1919, p. 247.

The correspondence between territorial units and descent groups in the Ekperi tribe was destroyed by the scattering which occurred at the time of the Nupe invasion. The new settlements which were formed further south contained elements from different villages, wards, and extended families. The original social units, however, continue to maintain some cohesion in such matters as title-taking and other ceremonial affairs.

The Uzairhue people say that they and the Ekperi, Avianwu, and Uwepa-Uwano are descended from one Benin man, Oluku.

AGE-GRADES AND AGE-SETS

Age-stratification of the male population is an important feature of the social organization as in all Edo-speaking groups, but few details are available for Etsako.

At Uzairhue there are names for different stages of childhood and adolescence through which all boys pass before being initiated into named age-sets which in some villages are formed at three-yearly intervals. The seven most junior sets, together with younger boys, perform such tasks as the clearing of farm paths and the sweeping of markets, the erection and re-roofing of public buildings and the cleansing of water-holes. In addition these seven sets provide night-watchmen in rotation.

At Aviele age-sets are formed every two or three years from boys in their late teens. Each set receives a name which it retains permanently and is attached to one of the three companies *obirua*, *ohovie*, and *obiyywa* (cf. Iybiosakon, Ineme, Ishan). When there was an important task to be undertaken, such as the construction of a wall around Agbede, all sets capable of working took part. Each was allotted a portion of the total task and the sets competed to see who would finish first. Less important tasks are usually performed by the three junior sets.

TITLE-ASSOCIATIONS

Title-associations played an important role in Ukpila, Uwepa-Uwano, and Avianwu, but not, according to the available information, in the remaining tribes. Admission is through an initiation ceremony after the payment of fees in money, livestock, and food to the existing members. There are, however, certain limiting conditions of entry. At Ukpila a man cannot take a title during his father's lifetime, nor can the son of an *amoya* marriage in Uwepa-Uwano. At Ekperi and Avianwu any free-born man might offer himself as a candidate, but public opinion would be against his doing so while there remained an older untitled man in his extended family.

At Avianwu there appears to be only one title-association branch for the tribe as a whole, but whether this is true of other tribes is not clear. In some tribes it is apparent that there is more than one title or that, alternatively, there are a number of title-grades within the same association.

Where title-associations exist a man's precedence in the affairs of his village is said to depend on the date of his admission to the association relative to that of other members. That is to say, "title age" rather than age in years is a principal determinant of social status. Advantages conferred by membership include exemption from communal labour, a claim to greater respect and authority, and the right to share the admission fees of new members.

The following are some details of the title-associations in individual tribes:—
Avianwu: the senior holder of the *oke* title in each territorial segment is entitled to special services from other members of the group.

Uwepa-Uwano: there are a number of titles of which *Oba* is the most important. A clash arose some years ago between the demands of the missions and the necessity of making sacrifices to join this association. Eventually Christians were allowed to join by making a monetary payment only.

An anonymous report, apparently referring to this tribe, states that the *oke*

title has three grades. Formerly a holder of this title could not be hanged or sold into slavery for murder and if he himself was murdered his family could claim seven men in compensation. No member could become a slave and all were exempted from communal labour.

Ukpila: here there is a senior title (*asogwa*) and a junior one (*umogba*). The holders of the latter act as messengers for the members of the senior association whose four leading members have individual titles.

Aviele: a report which apparently refers to this tribe describes an association called *ivotu*, formed of elders who have taken the *ivotu* title. The members carry staffs which they can place, as a curse, before the houses of persons refusing to comply with judicial decisions. In this respect their function seems to be similar to that of similarly named bodies in some Isha chiefdoms.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

1. Tribes without Title-associations

In Uzairhue, Auchi, and the Ibie tribes, where there are apparently no title-associations, age appears to be the main determinant of political office. The oldest man in the ward is the ward headman—called *adi* at Ibie—and meetings of the elders are summoned to his house. He or his deputy (*uko*) represents the ward at village meetings. His authority is associated with the fact that he is the keeper of the shrine of the ward founder. He receives an annual tribute of farm produce from the people of the ward and one of his duties is to see that the property of a dead man is properly divided between the heirs.

The same principal governs the ascription of authority at the village and tribal levels. In South Ibie, the oldest man in the tribe is priest of the founder's shrine and he receives services from all members of the tribe, although for most purposes each of the four villages is autonomous. At North Ibie the village headman (*okpe-ukpi*—keeper of the ceremonial drum, *ukpi*) summons meetings of the ward heads or their deputies, but these meetings are said to be presided over by the oldest man. Tribal meetings are said to have been rare in the past and to be concerned mainly with rituals at the shrine of the founder, Ogogo. In these ceremonies the elders of the various territorial segments took precedence according to age.

In Uzairhue tribe Ikpe village apparently had a hereditary headman, who claimed to be the direct descendant, by primogeniture, of the founder's eldest son. His authority over the whole tribe was supported by the Nupe, but this was contested by the priest of a shrine at Avia village, which is used for swearing oaths and divining. A tribal council, made up of all the village councils, is said to have met at the chief of Ikpe's house until a council house was built in the market place, but these meetings were infrequent and were called to discuss only such matters as the shortage of rain.

Since the coming of the Nupe and the British, secular village and tribal headmanship has become more important. At Auchi the Nupe recognized an influential man as their agent and he became accepted as the tribal headman, now called *Otaru*. Assistants, with the title *Dawudu*, were appointed in each village. At South Ibie the Nupe appointed agents in each village, and village rather than tribal headmanship has been the result. A similar situation exists at North Ibie. In Okpekepe village the chief takes the title *Apa*. Other title-holders and representatives of wards within the village join him in a village council, but spiritual authority remains in the hands of the oldest man, the *Agadigbo*. An attempt to make the *Apa* the tribal head of all North Ibie has been strongly resisted by one of the other villages.

There is little information concerning the functions of village councils apart from a statement that they direct the performance of "public works," regulate open and close periods for the exploitation of areas of grassland and palm-groves, and organize the collection of tax.

2. Tribes with Title-associations

In the Avianwu, Ekperi, Uwepa-Uwano, and Ukpila tribes political authority within each territorial segment is in the hands of members of title-associations who take precedence among themselves according to "title age".

At Uwepa-Uwano the senior titled man in each ward has the title *obosu*; village and tribal meetings consist of the *obosu* and other senior title-holders. In addition there is an *okpe-ukpi* (cf. *Ibie*), who uses his drum to summon village meetings, but does not preside over them. At Avianwu, on the other hand, the *okpe-ukpi* is the village headman and he is supported by two other officials with the titles *ogbose* and *ogbe-ikpeshi*. The right to appoint these officials is reserved to certain wards, who exercise the privilege in rotation; *okpe-ukpi* is succeeded by *ogbe-ikpeshi*, who is in turn succeeded by a man from the ward whose turn it is to make the appointment. The *okpe-ukpi* retires when he becomes the oldest man of his ward and priest of the founder's shrine.

At Ekperi a tribal headmanship evolved under the Nupe and has become firmly established. At the present day there is a tendency for the emergence of secular political offices, which are generally filled by young literate men.

3. Aviele

Aviele, more frequently called Agbede after its principal settlement, differs from the other Etsako tribes in having a well-developed, centralized political organization. All the villages are subject to the authority of the *Oba* of Agbede. Up to the time of *Oba Momodu* succession seems to have been by primogeniture in the male line, but Momodu introduced collateral succession. Nupe titles were introduced, and, for the most part, are reserved to the family of the *Oba*. They are ranked in a fixed order. When a title-holder dies those junior to him each move up one step and a new man is appointed to the most junior title. The *Oba* and title-holders—*igbanuzomi* (turban chiefs) or *ekhaemo* (the Edo word)—constitute the ruling group in the tribe. All males of the *Oba's* lineage were given the right to demand free services from the rest of the population. The prosperity of Agbede led to an influx of population and to some depopulation of the other villages. In these other villages the internal political organization seems to be of the *Ibie* type, but it is completely overshadowed by the authority of the *Oba*.

4. Present-day Local Government

In each tribe there is a Subordinate Native Authority made up of representatives of the villages and wards. In predominantly Muslim tribes, such as Aviele and Auchí, these representatives often have such titles as *Dawudu* and *Iyama*. Where there is no recognized tribal headman there is an executive committee. Each tribe has two representatives on the Etsako Federal Native Authority, one of whom is the tribal head, where present.

LAW AND ORDER

In the indigenous social organization of the Etsako tribes there seems to have been no separation of judicial from executive authority. Apart from serious crimes such as murder, arson, habitual theft, etc., a settlement was made within the smallest territorial segment to which both parties involved belonged. The basis of settlement was compensation varying in amount and kind and, most probably, with the relative status of the parties.

In civil disputes enforcement of judicial decisions was left to the successful litigant, who might curse his opponent, place "medicine" outside his house, or seize property belonging to him or his kinsmen. The *isotu* of Aviele (see p. 104 above) appear to have had special judicial functions.

There was no overall authority for the settlement of disputes between members

of different tribes. Between some tribes there was a taboo on blood-letting and people with relatives in two or more tribes were used in effecting peaceful settlements. Beyond this the only sanction was self-help.

LAND TENURE⁴

The information concerning rights to land among the Etsako is somewhat confused. While the heads of village communities are sometimes stated to be the nominal owners of village land, the farming land appears normally to be parcelled out between wards. Within the ward there are collective land-holding rights in the sense that no claims to rights in fallow are recognized either on the part of individuals or families, though extended families associated with descent groups of two to three generations in depth generally farm a discrete bloc of land during the two-year cycle of cultivation. Boundaries between the farming territories of wards are marked by natural features such as streams. Members of other wards within the same village may be allowed farm land with the consent of the village "elders" and without any payments. Strangers, however, must approach the village council through the "elders" of the ward in which they wish to farm and pay fees in yams and palm-wine, which are shared by ward and village elders. In the modern situation lease of land to aliens must be referred to the tribal council. Surface rents payable under mining titles, however, go to the village rather than the tribal authorities.

Permanent crops may be planted by members of the ward community at will and by members of other wards in the village with the consent of ward elders. Such crops are the property of the planter and pass, on his death, to his heirs. He may pledge, mortgage, or sell them, but if the transferee is a stranger the elders may withhold permission to do so. The transfer of crops does not alter the ownership of the land on which they are planted.

Boundary disputes appear to have been rare in the past, but the introduction of permanent crops and the increasing importance of the palm-oil industry has led to a desire to define boundaries. The boundaries in question are those between villages, and disputes are generally settled by the swearing of oaths at the disputed boundary by the headmen of the villages concerned; oaths are sworn on the spirits of the "ancestors," who are held to have first farmed in the area and carry their own penalty in the sense that disaster is believed to befall a village or village head who has sworn falsely.

Women have no rights in land, but may obtain plantations by purchase, gift, or by paying labour to plant and work them.

Fishing rights appear to follow the same principles as rights in land. Each area of water has its keeper, who controls the opening and closing of fishing seasons, probably on the behalf of his community.

INHERITANCE

The pattern of inheritance is influenced by the presence of the two alternative forms of marriage (*enabo* being more or less equivalent to *amoya* in this respect). Unless redeemed by his father in one of the ways described above a son of an *isomi* marriage inherits in the descent group of his mother.

In the case of *amoya* marriages sons are the first heirs, and the first-born *amoya* son receives the first and largest share of his deceased father's property. At North Ibie and Ukpila, according to Thomas, he is, indeed, the sole heir. At Agbede, on the other hand, the first sons of all *amoya* wives get shares, while at Auch and Uzairhne all *amoya* sons or all adult *amoya* sons shares in order of age.

Failing sons the heir is said to be, at Ibie and Ukpila, the eldest daughter, and she is followed by the eldest surviving brother. Elsewhere, however, brothers

⁴ See Rowling, 1948, pp. 12-17.

appear to take precedence over daughters. When an *amoya* son is too young to receive his inheritance his father's brother becomes his guardian—marrying his mother at Agbede, according to one account—and takes on the responsibility of bringing him up and providing him with a wife. At Fuga (Avianwu tribe), Thomas reports a rather different inheritance pattern whereby the chief heir is the brother, brother's son or own son, according to which is the eldest.

In some places daughters may inherit some of their fathers' movable property such as cloth, beads, and goats, especially when the estate is a large one.

The position of children of *isomi* marriages who remain with the mother's family is not clear. A list given by Thomas² suggests that at Fuga an *isomi* son may inherit from almost any paternal or maternal kinsman who is also the son of an *isomi* marriage. Other statements indicate that an *isomi* son's best chances of inheritance are from his mother's brothers who have no adult *amoya* sons. *Amoya* widows pass to the heirs of the deceased (a man cannot of course marry his own mother), though older widows, even of *amoya*, may be allowed to return home.

Rules of inheritance of women's property depend upon whether the deceased was an *amoya* or *isomi* wife. In either case her children are her heirs though at Agenebode (Uwepa-Uwano) the brother of an *isomi* wife is said to have preference over her son who may, however, inherit from the latter. Here an *amoya* wife's property is said to go to other *amoya* wives of the same husband or to his brothers' wives.

At Auchu an *amoya* wife's heir, failing children, is her husband. In similar circumstances the property of an *isomi* wife passes to her sister or other members of her descent group. Where an *isomi* has a son he should show the property to his mother's descent group and receive it back from them.

The division of property is said to be supervised by the headman of the deceased's ward.

Succession to statuses, where hereditary, generally passes to the next oldest male rather than to sons.

THE LIFE CYCLE

BIRTH*

At Agbede a woman may deliver a child anywhere but in a sleeping-room. She is assisted by a woman, who must not herself be pregnant; for her services she receives a small present from the husband when the delivery is complete. The first woman to wash the child after birth continues to do so for the next three months. The mother remains in the same place before she is allowed to go out to fetch firewood and she must not go to the farm for three months.

The placenta is buried under the eaves of the house. The umbilical cord is, according to one account, tied up and hung over the place where the child sleeps; another version says that it is put in an empty pot over the fire and reduced to ashes which are tied in a leaf and hung over the fire. On the seventh day the child is removed from the house, which is swept and rubbed down. At this time it receives a special kind of food served in a shell. After three months the mother gives the child palm-nut which she has previously chewed herself.

At Ikpe, Uzairhue, the child's end of the cord is dried in the smoke from a fire and hung in a palm-tree which then becomes the child's own property.

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

At Agbede male children are circumcised soon after birth if the child is strong enough, but otherwise three months afterwards or even later according to the wishes

² Thomas, 1910 (1), pt. I, sect. iv, p. 81.

* See Thomas, 1922.

of the parents. According to one report clitoridectomy is performed on a woman during her first pregnancy.

A son (presumably of an *amoya* marriage; see below) lives and works with his father until the latter gives him a wife and allows him to build his own house and make his own farm. Even after this he should continue to present yams to his father annually.

MARRIAGE²

There are three alternative forms of marriage called, in most tribes, *amoya*, *isomi*, and *enabo*.

An *amoya* wife is one for whom a full marriage-payment has been made. The husband and his descent group acquire full rights in *uxorem* and in *genetricem*.³ In no circumstances is she allowed to pass out of her husband's family although, should her husband be impotent, she may be allowed to take a lover in order to produce an heir. On the husband's death she passes to one of his heirs. The children are fully affiliated to the husband's descent group.

In *isomi* marriage the marriage-payment is smaller and, according to Thomas, the woman may terminate the marriage at any time. Some accounts say that the children of an *isomi* marriage are divided between the descent groups of the husband and the wife's father. Thomas says they belong to the latter unless the father redeems a son by purchasing a title for him or acquiring an *amoya* wife for him or unless the son himself chooses after his father's death to remain with the latter's family and inherit a share of his father's property.

Enabo marriage differs from *amoya* only in that the wife comes from a different tribe. At Ibie when a man dies his *enabo* widow must marry his heir or return to her own town; she cannot marry another man in her husband's town.

According to Thomas an *amoya* wife is acquired at Fuga (Avianwu) when she is only four or five years old; the husband takes her away without ceremony and she is brought up in his household. He receives the whole marriage-payment for daughters of the marriage, the mother's family having no share.

An *isomi* marriage at Fuga involves a smaller marriage-payment, but additional services are due to the parents-in-law. The suitor, once accepted, begins to assist his father-in-law on the latter's farm, and fetches water and firewood for the mother. The ceremony involves the exchange of presents between the two "families." On reaching her husband's house the girl sweeps it out with a broom and 10 days later begins to work on her husband's farm. She lives with her husband's mother or senior wife, sometimes until her own children are old enough to work, but if she misbehaves she may be removed to a house of her own. At Auchi the bride-price on the daughter of an *isomi* marriage is divided between the descent groups of the father and mother, the latter receiving the bigger share.

There is no information on the range of marriage prohibitions beyond the fact that marriage is forbidden between close kin and that the ward, in some tribes at least, was formerly exogamous. It is reported that at Uwepa there are two exogamous marriage "classes". The children of an *amoya* or *enabo* wife belong to their father's class, those of an *isomi* wife to the mother's class. This rule is upheld even if an *isomi* child decides to affiliate with his father's people.

DEATH AND MORTUARY RITES

These differ in detail from tribe to tribe, but in general are of the same pattern as those of other branches of the Edo-speaking peoples. It is interesting to note that in some tribes different animals are killed "for" different parts of the deceased's

² For details see Thomas, 1910 (I), pt. I, sect. iii. For comparisons with North-West Edo see p. 121 below.

³ Thomas, indeed, suggests that the transfer of rights over an *amoya* wife is so complete that in some places only slaves become *amoya* wives.

body, a custom which is reminiscent of the Ibo. Mourning is commonly signified by shaving the head, in some cases different patterns being used according to the kinship relation between the mourner and the deceased.⁹

RELIGION AND MAGIC

Beyond the fact that founders of wards, villages, and tribes are deified and worshipped by the community nothing is at present known of the religious and magical practices of the Etsako.

WITCHCRAFT

Witchcraft beliefs appear to follow the same general pattern as those of the Benin people and sasswood was, in the past, commonly resorted to in order to establish witchcraft guilt. During the early 1940s a witch-finding movement, *onene*, reached considerable proportions, especially in the Uwepa-Uwano area. The witches, who were mainly children, were removed to the house of the *onene* priest and kept there until their families ransomed them with a he-goat, a cock and payment of a sum of money. If the child died in custody the parents were charged 10s. before being allowed to take away the body. Witchcraft guilt was established by diviners and the witches, who were held to be able to change themselves into animals or birds,¹⁰ were accused of causing deaths, spoiling crops, etc. Eventually the movement was officially suppressed. Other similar movements have arisen from time to time in the Edo-speaking country.

⁹ For further details see Thomas, 1920 (2) and 1910 (1), pt. 1, sect. ii.

¹⁰ The word *afami*, "bird" (cf. Edo *ahiaue*) was used to describe a witch.

THE NORTH-WEST EDO LOCATION, NOMENCLATURE, AND LANGUAGE

This section deals with 28 autonomous or semi-autonomous Edo-speaking communities in the northern part of Kukuru Division. Most settlements are now located on the plain, but many were formerly perched on the tops of rocky hills for purposes of safety from attack. It is impossible to say from the information available how many of these communities were hill-dwelling before the Yoruba and Nupe incursions of the latter half of the 19th century, but nearly all became so during that period. Since the coming of British rule there has been a general descent to the lowlands, encouraged at first by British administrators, but motivated, more recently, by a desire to be near the motor-roads.

The word "Akoko" is generally used to refer to these and also to certain non-Edo-speaking peoples in northern Kukuru and neighbouring parts of Owo Division. Hence the term "North-West Edo" is used here to distinguish between Edo- and non-Edo-speaking communities; all the North-West Edo, with the exception of Igwe, are at present included under the Akoko-Igara Native Authority.¹

The Edo dialects in this area are extremely fragmented, and neighbouring towns and villages differ remarkably in this respect. Some possibly reflect Yoruba, Igbara, or Igala (Idah) influences.

DEMOGRAPHY AND SETTLEMENT PATTERN

<i>Regional groupings</i>	<i>Villages</i>	<i>Words</i>	<i>Extended families</i>	<i>Pop.*</i>
Northern group	1. Osi	3	8	721
	2. Ikiran† and Ikiran Ile (Iheru Ile)	2	4	3,178
	3. Ugbosc-oke and Ugbosc-isale	7		1,086
	4. Ogugu	2		347
	5. Ibillo *	4	8	4,180
	6. Ekor (Ekr)	2	6	413
	7. Ekpesa (Ekpesa)	3	4	321
	8. Umorga (Umorga)	4		3,121
	9. Lankpese (Lankpese)	2	11	2,460
	10. Ekpe	2	3	547
The hill towns	11. Ibiokuma (Vieokuma)	3		376
	12. Somorika and Eshiawa	3	19	1,705
	13. Ogbe	2	6	627
	14. Onumu	2	5	303
South-western group	15. Okpe (Okpe)	17		2,678
	16. Ijaja			207
	17. Olomo	5		353
Southern group	18. Ate	4	9	1,805
	19. Ikpeshi and Egbigele *	6	20	1,826
	20. Igwe *	4	15	1,098
	21. Enwan	3	19	2,365
	22. Sasaro (Sasaro)	4	6	312
	23. Akuku	2	6	698
Eastern group	24. Oja (Odra)	3	7	2,222
	25. Dagbala (Dagbala)	4		1,074
	26. Ojirami (Ojirami)		6	1,982
	27. Makoko	4	15	1,076
	28. Ososo (Ososo)	4		6,532
Total				45,682

* The population figures are from the 1952 Census bulletin and include strangers. The figures for Ibillo and Ikpeshi both include a leper settlement. Igwe is now included under the Iyibiosakon Federal Native Authority.

Each village community forms a more or less compact settlement with one or more streets with houses arranged along the sides. The wards of a village may, however, be separated from each other by short stretches of bush. As can be seen from the list above, these village communities vary in population from less than 400 to more than 6,000 persons.

† Ikiran is also called Ebune (Ebune) and Eyo.

NOTES ON SOME OF THE ABOVE COMMUNITIES¹

1. The wards are no longer territorial.
2. Ikiran and Ikiran-Ile are two miles apart, but socially and politically they form a single unit.
3. Six of seven wards correspond to descent groups and sections of each are found in both villages. There are, however, separate village headmen.
7. Ekpressa consists of four descent groups (with dependants), two of which are closely associated.
8. The wards are no longer territorial.
12. The immigrant elements at Somorika are said to be descended from two brothers, Owa and Esamo, to each of whom five extended families trace their origin. In Oyenokara ward there are one Esama family and two Owa families; in Egoni, one Esamo and three Owa families, and in Oyenovo three Esamo families. One Owa family of Egoni is divided into three segments. Of the aboriginal elements Uwehumi is included in Egoni, Ogogoro and Uso are in Oyenovo, and Uwakpe is divided between the three wards. Oyenovo contains, in addition, refugees from Eshiawa who never returned to their old site. Eshiawa proper is socially and politically subordinate to the section of the community which remains at Somorika.
13. The two wards are half a mile apart.
15. The people of one ward are descendants of refugees from Ijaja.
16. Ijaja has no sub-divisions.
19. Though territorially separate these villages form a single social and political unit. Segments of all wards and extended families are found in both villages.
20. Wards are non-territorial. Some members of all extended families and wards have moved to a new site on the motor-road.
21. The extended families are territorial, the wards no longer so.
22. Sassaru has six major descent groups of which two are closely associated with and subsidiary to two others.
24. The wards are territorial units, but members of each extended family live in each ward.
25. The wards are non-territorial.
26. Ojirami is divided geographically into two parts, but is socially and politically one unit. It is divided into six descent groups each representing a different migration.
27. The wards are non-territorial. One extended family has changed its ward allegiance on more than one occasion. One ward has descent groups called Enwan and Ikpesi which suggests that these are immigrants from the villages of those names.
28. With the exception of one extended family, wards and families are territorial entities.

¹ The following non-Edo communities in Kukuruku come under the same Native Authority:—

Igara (*Gara*), an Igbara-speaking town in the centre of the southern part of North-West Edo country.

Imeri, a Yoruba-speaking town on the western border of the Division.

Ekakumo (*Ekakumo*) and Anyaran (*Anyaran*), two villages in the north-west corner of the Division which speak a non-Edo and apparently non-Yoruba language which they share with two other villages across the border in Owo Division.

Temple suggests that the villages, Ogori and Megongo, in the neighbouring parts of Kabba Province, should be regarded as Kukuruku tribes; a small sample of the language of Megongo, however, indicates that they are not Edo-speaking.

All these non-Edo communities seem, however, to be of the same general social and cultural pattern as the North-West Edo.

² Some of the information given here will be intelligible only in the light of what follows.

TRADITIONS OF ORIGIN AND HISTORY

ORIGINS

Most of the North-West Edo claim that their ancestors migrated into the area either from Benin or from the Yoruba country on the west or from Idah on the east. The only people who claim to be aboriginals are Ogugu and Ekpese in the north and four groups—Uso, Uwehimi, Uwakpe, and Ogogoroso—which have been absorbed into Somorika.

The remainder of the Somorika population, five out of the six hamlets or descent-groups of Ojirami and the people of Enwan, Ate, Sasaru, Igwe, Dagbala, Onumu, Ogbe, Olomo, Umorga and Lankpese trace their origins to Benin. The Ate say they were driven from Benin by a giant, the founders of Igwe were a group sent out by the *Oba* to obtain victims for human sacrifices, and the founder of Dagbala left after committing adultery with the *Oba*'s wives. Other communities give other and similar reasons, but none of these migrations can be dated.

Many of the communities of Edo origin claim to have been settled elsewhere before coming to their present sites. The Enwan people were with the Emai tribe of Iybiosakon and the founders of Onumu, Ogbe, and Somorika are said to have crossed the Niger and settled near Idah and later to have moved to a site near Okene, the Igbira capital, before reaching their present locations.

The Ososo and Akuku peoples are said to have come from Idah, but it is doubtful whether this was their ultimate origin. Indeed the present Olososo (king of Ososo) says that his ancestors came from Benin, but that they had once claimed an Idah origin from a fear of being placed under Benin; in the course of their wandering they had crossed and re-crossed the Niger. Akuku seems at one time to have wished to be associated with Igara, the most prominent town in the area. The Igara people claim Idah origins though they speak an Igbira dialect. The dialect of Akuku, however, undoubtedly belongs to the Edo group.

Eshiawa, Ijaja, Osi, Ebune, Ugbosi, Ibillo, Ekor, and Ibiekuma all claim Ife origins, but these are not substantiated. The ancestors of Ugbosi are said to have lived at Aduge, near Kabba. Yoruba cultural influence is strong in the western part of this area and claims of Ife origin may arise from a desire to be associated with the Yoruba cultural metropolis.

The most unusual historical traditions are those of five communities which say they are descended from age-sets which broke away from their parent communities. These villages are Ekpe and Makeke (from Umorga), Ikpeshi and Egbigele (from Ikpeshi-Akoko, Owo Division), and one ward of Ojirami (from Lankpese). In two cases they say the age-set was sent out to catch bush-fowl or bush-rat and decided to settle down.

It is clear that the area is one into which groups have migrated from various directions and at different times. At present one can only speculate as to whether there may or may not have been an aboriginal stratum of Edo-speaking people. There is no reason to suppose that any particular community is descended from only one group of immigrants and in a few cases there is definite evidence to the contrary.

YORUBA RAIDS AND THE NUPE INVASION

The whole of the North-West Edo area came under the Nupe during the latter half of the 19th century. The Nupe invasions are said to have been preceded by incursions from Ibadan under a leader, Aje, but the dates of these raids are uncertain and it is possible that they continued after the coming of the Nupe. The Ibadan raids seem mainly to have been confined to the north-west corner of the region, but the Ososo people say their ancestors were driven away and their houses burnt by Yoruba before the Nupe came. Osi, Ebune, Ugbosi, Ibillo, Ekor, Ekpesa, Lankpese, Ibiekuma, and Ekpe are among the communities who were scattered or had their settlements sacked by the Yoruba. Lankpese and Ekpe

people fled to Ogugu and Ekpressa sought refuge near Somorika. Various groups from Ijaja found shelter at Idogun, Okpe, and Imeri, and some remain at the latter two places. Some of these scattered groups returned to their old sites after the raids passed to submit to or be driven out again by the Nupe, but the Ekpe people, for example, did not leave Ogugu again until 1917.

When the Nupe arrived some villages submitted, some were abandoned by their inhabitants, who fled to the tops of the neighbouring rocky hills, and others were sacked and their populations scattered. Eventually, however, with the possible exception of the inaccessible Ogugu and of Akuku (who may have sheltered at Igara or Somorika) all accepted Nupe rule. In each community the Nupe stationed a representative (*ajele*) to organize the collection of tribute and to promote Islam. Tribute was paid mainly in slaves, though money and guinea-corn are mentioned too. The Ososo people say that at first they had to provide 12 slaves a year, but that this figure was later reduced to six and money might be substituted. At the beginning tribute collectors came annually, but later two stayed in the town for periods of four and five years. They were given food and concubines and in return the village head received presents of horses and cloths.

Somorika and Okpe entered into friendly relations with the Nupe, who made their regional headquarters in these two towns. On the other hand, refugees from other communities are said to have found shelter at or near Somorika and at Okpe.

Nupe domination came to an end only with the appearance of the Royal Niger Company's agents in the 1890s. The scattered communities began to re-group themselves in their old or on new sites. But some did not leave their refuges for 20 years or more, and others probably never returned. Enwan and Sasaru remained close to Somorika until 1917.

HISTORY UNDER BRITISH RULE

After the departure of the Nupe the area was controlled by the Royal Niger Company which had officers at Ikaram, now in Owo Division. When the Company's charter was withdrawn (c. 1900) the greater part was attached to Kabba Province and administered at various times from Kabba, Okene, and Iddo. There was considerable opposition to British rule until 1909 when a military patrol captured Somorika which had been the chief centre of resistance. Taxation was introduced about 1910, each community being assessed for a lump sum.

Former lowland groups began to return to their old sites. Many still remained high up, however, especially in the rocky hills near Somorika and their inaccessibility created difficulties of administration. About 1917 an attempt was made to persuade them to come down and where they refused their houses were burnt. Enwan, Sasaru, Akuku, Osi, Ikiran, and Ogugu are said to have come down about this time. Not all communities returned to their original sites, however. About 1900, for instance, part of Ugbosi returned to Ugbosi-isale, the old location, but the rest remained at the foot of the hill to which they had fled from the Ibadan raids. The Sasaru people descended to the foot of the Igara ridge and did not begin to return to the pre-Nupe site on the Igara-Auchi road until 20 years later, although they own land there. Some of the original hill-dwelling communities—Somorika, Onumu, Ogbe, and Ijaja—remained on the tops of their hills. In the last 20 years, however, the Somorika people have descended to a lower plateau which is approachable by a very steep motor-road. Their pagan shrines remain on the hilltop, where they still bury their dead. Ogbe is still accessible only by a steep footpath.

Until 1918 all people in the area were regarded as subjects of the Attah of Idah and were required to attend court at Okene (the Igbara capital). In that year they were included in the newly-formed Kukuru Division, whose headquarters were first at Fuga and later at Auchi. In 1920 the Division was divided into a number of districts each under a District Head and North-West Edo communities were included in five of these districts, some of which contained Etsako and Ivbiosakor.

tribes. The District Heads acquired considerable personal authority and appointed their representatives in the villages, often giving them Nupe titles. This system was abolished in 1936 and later each community became a separate Native Authority.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND POLITICAL SYSTEM

KINSHIP AND TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION

The North-Western Edo inhabit compact towns and villages, usually divided into wards which may in turn contain a number of extended families having, as their nuclei, corporate, localized descent groups.

If the alternative forms of marriage described for the Etsako are practised in this area too (and the evidence is inconclusive) the probability is that the descent-groups are bilateral. There is no direct evidence concerning their structure, but the named founders of extended families are said to have lived, for the most part, more than 100 years ago. Extended families are no longer always discrete geographical entities; in several cases portions of the same family are attached to different wards and even different villages. Nevertheless, they still function as social units with a headman—usually the oldest man—and common objects of worship.

At Ososo there are six descent-groups to which affiliation is through the mother. Members of these "mother-groups" are supposed to support each other in times of misfortune. In Nupe times they are each said to have been responsible for providing two slaves annually towards the tribute sent to Bida. There is some indication that similar groups are present at Somorika and they may prove to be a more general feature of the area.

Wards, like families, are, in many cases, no longer discrete territorial entities, a situation which is probably due to the scattering and re-grouping of the last 100 years. They have, however, remained coherent socio-political units even when, as at Ikpeshi-Egbigele, all wards and extended families are divided between two villages. It is not clear how consistently wards can be associated with single descent-groups; at Somorika this seems certainly not to be the case. In some wards particular families have special privileges in such matters as the appointment of ward headmen.

Although the town or village is usually the autonomous unit the latter is in some cases a pair of villages, which have resulted from the splitting of a single community in recent times. Though divided geographically the community nevertheless generally continues to function as a single social and political unit. In the case of Osi and Ikiran, however, fission has been more complete.

The three communities Oja, Dagbala, and Ojirami are together called *Okuluso*, a term apparently connected with the *ukpe* festival which is common to them all. They are closely related in dialect and culture though they claim different origins.

AGE-GROUPINGS, TITLE-ASSOCIATIONS, AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

As among other sections of the Edo-speaking peoples men's age-grades and age-sets and title-associations are important features of the social organization. There are differences of detail, however, in such matters as the presence or absence of individual titles and the means of acquiring them, the relations between age-companies and title-associations, etc. For purposes of description the North-West Edo may be considered in the following groups:—

1. A northern group—Osi, Ogugu, Ikiran, Ugbosi, Ibillo, Ekor, Ekpressa, Ibiékuma, Lankpese, Ekpe, and Umorga.
2. A hill group—Somorika-Eshiawa, Onumu, and Ogbe.
3. A south-western group—Okpe, Ijaja, and Olomo.
4. A southern group—Ate, Ikpeshi-Egbigele, Igwe, Enwan, Sasaru, Akuku.

5. An eastern group—Oja, Dagbala, Ojirami, Makeke, Ososo.

Each of these groups will be dealt with separately below.

The political organization is everywhere complicated by the disturbed history of the last 100 years. Indigenous political offices seem to have been associated with the guardianship of ward and village shrines, priests being selected according to a variety of principles—age, differential ranking between territorial segments, divination, etc. The members of title-associations, too, played a leading part in the authority structure.

This system was destroyed or overlaid by the Nupe who generally selected the three leading personalities in each community and gave them Nupe titles, *Zeike*, *Dawudu*, and *Danya*. The *Zeike* was regarded as the village headman and the *Dawudu*, who was his messenger and deputy, was often his brother or son and his successor, though in some cases the title was given to another strong personality. These title-holders, backed by the Nupe, acquired considerable authority and bequeathed to their descendants claims to village headmanship. Their claims were encouraged by Muslim District Heads who, in the period 1920 to 1936, resuscitated Nupe titles where they had lapsed and created new ones. The holders of these titles were their representatives and protégés exactly as they had been *vis-à-vis* the Nupe.

The British adopted a similar method in selecting other village headmen in the early days of the administration. They and their heirs now constitute a third set of claims to authority.

The result of all this is considerable confusion in the political organization. The headmen appointed by the Nupe and the British seem to have taken little account of such institutions as title-associations, and the latter, as well as the ward and village priest-headman, seem to have lost all but their ceremonial and ritual functions in many cases.

The Northern Group

The meagre information available about these communities (see list, p. 110 above) suggests that all have named age-grades through which pass sets of males formed at seven-year intervals. The minimum age of entry into a set is said to be about 16. There are from two to six grades in each of which a man must spend seven years before he becomes an "elder" (*oriosi* at Osi), privileged to wear a straw hat (*okala*) and carry a carved staff. Entrance into the first grade is accompanied by initiation rites which are said to include *egwungun* (a Yoruba cult); masquerades and further rites take place at each successive promotion. Some grade names are found in several communities, but no two lists of grades are identical.

In some villages the status of elder does not automatically follow when a man has passed through all the age-grades. At Osi, where there are six grades, any person from the third grade upwards can take the status *erekpa* by sacrificing a goat and two fowls, entertaining the town and paying a small sum to the elders; he thus gains exemption from the communal tasks appropriate to his grade. Elsewhere title-associations appear to be extensions of the age-grade system in which promotion is effected individually instead of by sets. Thus at Ugboji, which has five grades, promotion to the second and third grades is by sets, but beyond that by personal qualification and payments. At Ikiran and Ibillo a man who has passed through all the grades may, by making sacrifices, entertaining the village and giving presents to the elders, acquire the *umu* title. Only then does he become an "elder." At Ikiran an elder (*eku-okala*) is privileged to wear a straw hat and carry a carved staff and at Ibillo (where he is called *oja*) he wears a red turban; here payments to the elders are said to amount to £5 and seven goats.

Throughout this area the age-grades and title-associations have declined with the refusal of Christians to undergo the necessary ceremonies of initiation and promotion.

Among these northern communities the only titled offices are those given to priests and ward and village headmen. In the indigenous political organization the latter seem to have been the priests of ward and village shrines who were drawn from particular extended families and wards. In some cases they were the oldest men in their territorial group, in others hereditary, in others to be chosen by members of their territorial segments (or in one case from one ward by "the whole village") and in still others by divination. In some instances the right of appointment claimed by a particular family or ward is disputed by other groups and in others rights of appointment may have alternated or rotated between various segments.

In certain communities there is a separation of priestly from secular ward or village headmanship. At Osi there is a priest of the village deity (*orimosi*), who should always come from one family, and a distinct secular head, *oya*, from the same family. Elsewhere such separation of functions appears to date from the Nupe period. Thus at Ibillo there is a priest (*Udea*), and the *Onibilo* (called *Zekke* before 1930) who was appointed first by the Nupe and later by the District Head. The two functionaries sit side by side at village meetings.

There is little information concerning the existence, composition, or function of ward and village councils. At Osi there is said to be a council composed of the priests of *orimosi* and other deities which, however, meets only to make arrangements for festivals. At Ugbosi and Ogugu one or more of the senior age-grades are said to perform this function, and at Ibillo members of the *umu* title-association are said to constitute the council.

The Hill Towns

These three hill communities, Somorika, Onumu, and Ogbe claim to have been founded by the same band of immigrants; they speak similar dialects and their social organization is of the same pattern.

Age-sets are formed every 11 years at Somorika and Onumu and every five years at Ogbe. The minimum age of entry is about 16 and the sets are named by the elders. At Ogbe and Onumu they are disbanded on the formation of the fifth and third sets junior to them respectively.

In all three communities there is a title, *umu* (the pronunciation at Somorika is *woomu*), whose holders are called *ilezi* (Somorika), *ekulafumaze* (Ogbe) or *ekuloyanafe* (Onumu). At Somorika, it is reported, any male from the fifth set upwards can take the title by making certain sacrifices, entertaining the town and making gifts to the value of £10 to the elders; at the other two villages it is the members of the senior age-set and the disbanded age-sets who are eligible. At Somorika the title confers the insignia of a straw hat and carved staff, but at the other two villages these privileges are reserved to a more senior title-association, called *eku* at Ogbe and *eya* at Onumu. At Ogbe a man can become *eku* by giving a feast in the year following the taking of the *umu* title but, according to the information available, an Onumu man must wait eleven years before sacrificing two goats and becoming *eya*.²

Only ward and village headmen and priests hold individual titled offices and in the past secular and priestly functions were probably invested in the same individual. At Onumu the two ward headmen, *Okara* and *Otaru*, are chosen by divination from specified families; they are the priests of the ward deities. At Ogbe the position is similar, but the ward headman should be the oldest man. Village headmanship is not highly developed at Onumu or Ogbe. In the latter community one party claims that the two ward headmen are equal, but several families claim the right to appoint a village head. Guardianship of the six village shrines is shared between

² If our information is correct, and taking into account the age-set intervals, the minimum age at which a man would achieve the right to wear these insignia would vary from about 37 at Ogbe to 49 at Onumu to 60 at Somorika.

three families, one of which controls four and the others one each. Authority is said formerly to have been vested mainly in the members of the two title-grades.

The political organization of Somorika has been much affected by the special relations of the community with the Nupe. Originally the village headman is said to have been the priest of the village deity, and he is now called *Otaru*; the descendants of the two immigrant founders (see above p. 111) alternated in appointing the incumbent. Eventually the *Otaru* became so sacred that he was confined to his house and during the Nupe period the man chosen by the descendants of Owa to fill the position gave it to his brother and himself took over the secular authority. Backed by the Nupe he imposed serfdom on the descendants of Esamo and the aboriginal elements, forbidding them to keep cattle, collect palm-produce, wear beads, or worship the family deities, and forcing them to work for the descendants of Owa. The descendants of this man, Usamo, have ever since appointed the village headman, now called *Ima*, though since 1936 there has been considerable opposition from the rest of the population.

As noted above (p. 111) the descendants of both brothers and the aboriginal elements are scattered through the three wards. There is no information concerning the structure of the wards.

The South-Western Group

Okpe, Ijaja, and Olomo, the three settlements in the south-west, are distinguished by the apparent absence of title-associations while there are hereditary individual titles.

At Okpe there are age-sets of 12-year span named by the *Alala*, who is the hereditary headman of one of the wards. The fourth and fifth sets are together called *okomokugbe* and function as the executive arm of authority in the community. They act as messengers to the council of title-holders and meet with them each morning at the *Alala's* house to discuss matters affecting the community which are to be brought before the *Olokpe* (village chief). When a set ceases to be *okomokugbe* its members are exempted from specific communal duties. Ijaja forms its age-sets at the same time as Okpe and, with one exception, they have the same names. Olomo is more akin to the northern communities in having three age-grades, including the elders, *ekpase*.

At Okpe each ward has a hereditary title which passes from father to son; the title-holders are known collectively as *iwie*.⁴ They form a village council which is attended by *okomokugbe*, acting in the capacity of messengers. The *Olokpe* or *Ela* (father) is the hereditary head of one ward and of the whole community.

At Ijaja there are four hereditary titles, including that of the *Onijaja* (village head). The third age-set plays a prominent role in the political organization.

At Olomo each ward selects its own headman, but the village headman's title, *Ogua*, is hereditary. The *Ogua* and the two senior age-grades constitute the authoritative body in the indigenous political organization.

The Southern Group

In the five villages of this group age-sets are formed every three years, except in the case of Sasaru where the interval is seven years. The minimum age of entry is about 16 and the sets are named by their members, the elders, or the village headman; at Ate naming is delayed until all the members are married. When a set has a number of other sets junior to it (the number varies from four to nine) it is disbanded. Members of disbanded sets are called *opepe* at Igwe and *isogua* at

⁴ Sing. *ovie*. Cf. Otwa (Ivibesakon), Ososo, and several Ushobo communities. The word seems formerly to have been in more common use but has in many places been replaced by *Otaru*—a title possibly derived from *Attak*, the title of the kings of Igbara and Idah—or by Yoruba-type titles such as *Onibilo*, *Olososo*, etc.

Sasaru. At Enwan, Ikpeshi, and Egbigele members of the three most junior sets perform such tasks as clearing farm paths and cleaning markets.

With the possible exception of Sasaru all the villages have one or more title-associations open to men. At Enwan the *okpa* title can be acquired by any man who sacrifices a cock in the market-place, entertains the town, and pays a small sum to the existing members. At Ate and Ikpeshi-Egbigele there are three associations, which should perhaps be regarded as three grades of the same association. The cost of entering the three grades at Ate, *ebe*, *okpa* and *izma*, was, in 1940, 6s., £5 and a castrated goat and £7 to £15 respectively. In all these cases there is said to be no age qualification, but at Akuku only members of disbanded age-sets are eligible for title-taking. In the latter village there are 16 individual titles (*oga*), each of which can be held by one or more persons. They are achieved in much the same way as the association-titles in the other communities and they may be a recent innovation. The individual titles at Enwan certainly are; they were fabricated in 1930 at the request of a District Officer who asked the people to abandon their Nupe titles and to restore their indigenous Edo ones. Ninety-one titles were produced, four or five for every family, which were made available to any member of the *okpa* association who was prepared to pay £5. By 1940 they had lost their popularity. At Ate, on the other hand, holders of Nupe titles appointed during the period of District Heads still constituted the village council in 1940.

At Enwan ward headmen are the oldest title-holders in the ward and at Igwe the oldest man of all used to be the village head. Elsewhere village headmanship is disputed. At Sasaru there was apparently no recognized headman with secular functions before 1911. The *Zeike* or *Ogua* of Ikpeshi ruling in 1940 is said to have been appointed by the former District Head. Ate, however, has a headman with the Benin title, *Ogie*.

The Eastern Group

In Oja, Dagbala, Ojirami, Makeke, and Ososo age-sets are formed at seven-year intervals. At Ososo, where the age-sets function on a ward basis, the most junior set, *ekwabirowbo* is responsible for the care of the *irewbo*, an open space where dances and meetings in connection with the ward deity take place. The members of another set who have taken the *ioialegi* title (see below) "serve" the farm deity which each ward has close to its farms. The Okuluso villages—Oja, Dagbala, and Ojirami—form their age-sets at the same time and with one exception they have the same names.

In all villages except Ososo there are six title-associations or title-grades, those of the Okuluso villages having the same names. The first, *isukuru*, is open to boys who have not entered their first age-set and who gain admittance by paying a small fee to the village headman. At Oja, the second association, *oso*, is joined by a whole or part of an age-set whose members perform masquerades, entertain the town, and present 200 yams to the village headman. On the death of his father any member of this rank can take the *eja* title by paying 4s. to the village headman. At Dagbala and Ojirami both these ranks are said to be joined by age-sets rather than individuals. At Ososo, on the other hand, all six title-grades are open to individuals on the payment of small fees in money and kind and the performance of initiation ceremonies. All the titles may be taken at the same time should the individual wish.

All villages have individual titles which "belong" to descent-groups; they are available to members of the senior title-grade. In Oja, for example, five descent-group have two titles each and the other two one each, the holders being selected by the group from its members who hold the *eja* title. Each of the seven descent-groups of Ojirami "owns" three titles, *Okogbe* or *Otaru*, *Obolo*, and *Oka*, the first being that of the headman and the second of his designated successor. At Dagbala the four wards each have four titles, *Okogbe*, *Otaru*, *Obolo*, and *Ogisua*. At Makeke

there are many titles, some recently created. Any member of the senior title-grade, *uma*, can take a title formerly held by his father or brother by entertaining the town. At Ososo each descent-group owns one, two, or more titles collectively called *ivie*. Candidates for these titles must have performed the burial rites of their father and must have been members of the senior title-grade, *ivialegi*, for at least seven years. They pay fees to the other *ivie* and perform certain ceremonies; their insignia is a conical straw hat.

There is little information concerning the exercise of political authority. One of the title-holders is usually recognized as the headman in each ward and one of these ward headmen is the village head. In some cases village headmanship may have been an innovation of Nupe times. At Dagbala the Nupe called the senior *Okogbe Zeike* and the second *Dawudu*. At Makeke they recognised the *Osheku* of one ward as *Zeike* though the *Osheku* of another ward is priest of two of the village deities. At Oja and Dagbala all *eja* are members of the village council.

At Ososo the *ivie* are said to form a council which meets every ninth day, traditionally on the day before market-day, but in recent years on market-day itself. There is some evidence that the headman of Ososo held a hereditary post, but this is disputed by one of the wards which claims that it should alternate between two wards.

LAW AND ORDER

Under the indigenous system meetings of priests and members of title-associations were convened for the hearing and judgment of criminal cases and civil disputes. In various communities they are said to have been held in the house of the village head, in the open air or at the scene of the crime. At Okpe where there are no title-associations the holder of the *Alaka* title had special judicial functions and meetings for this purpose were generally held at his house.

All cases except murder, manslaughter, and arson could be settled by the heads of "extended families" when they occurred within the group, but they would be taken before the village meeting if a settlement could not be reached. The three crimes named above were an affront to the whole community. The three Okuluso villages, though otherwise independent of each other, held joint meetings to try murderers at the spot where the crime occurred.¹

In civil disputes the two parties paid small fees to the meeting, the successful one being expected to make further presents after the judgment. Resort was had to ordeals and oaths to establish evidence. Ordeals were generally similar to those found among other sections of the Edo-speaking peoples; at Lankpese the defendant may be asked to eat kola-nuts placed on the staffs of members of the title-associations, which are thought to harm him if he is not telling the truth. Oaths, too, are taken on the insignia of the title-associations, or on certain deities.

The penalty for murder was death in all communities except Ate, where the family of the murderer was banished and their property destroyed. The death penalty was usually executed by forcing the murderer to hang himself in the market-place or by burying him alive. Manslaughter was compensated by the transference of one or two of the offender's kin or slaves to the family of the deceased. Arson was everywhere a serious crime and an offender caught in the act might be cast into the flames.

For other offences fines and compensation were the principles underlying punishment. In cases of assault the offender was made to look after the injured until he or she was cured. At Enwan a thief was publicly ridiculed by his own age-set, at Ikpeshe he was painted with charcoal and publicly mocked, and in the north-eastern villages his age-mates seized and killed goats, cocks, etc., for which he had to compensate the owner. In all communities a proved adulterer should pay

¹ Cf. the Ivbie-Imion group in Ivblosakon. See pp. 93-4 above.

various animals and fowls to the husband for sacrifice, presumably to the latter's ancestors. At Okpe, however, the seducer of the *Olokpe's* wife might be executed and she herself sold into slavery.

Fines were shared by the judges. Compensation was often in the form of livestock as well as money.

The insignia of title-associations were used to enforce compliance with judicial decisions. At Ikpesi, for instance, the *okpa* bells could be placed in front of a judgment debtor's house; if they remained there overnight the offender would be liable to an increased fine. At Ate a judgment debtor might be detained at the *Ogie's* house until his kin ransomed him. Generally, however, enforcement was left to the successful litigant, who would be permitted to put bad "medicine" in his opponent's house, seize his livestock, or make use of his farm.

LAND TENURE*

Among the North-West Edo, in contrast with Etsako and Iybiosakon, there appears to be a differentiation of land rights below the ward level. "Family" groups are said to hold exclusive rights over farming tracts and family heads have discretion over the alienation of tree crops by sale or pledge. Igbira people who farm in some areas pay rents to the "families" who own the land. On the first day of an open season each family exploits the tree crops on its land jointly and thereafter individuals may work them separately.

The Enwan community as a whole is said to have purchased its land from Igara and Akuku for money and slaves, though the latter communities claim that they did not cede full rights.

The relation, in respect of land, between North-West Edo and the Ineme communities interspersed with them is described below.

Newly cleared land is the property of the individual who clears it and passes to his heirs.

INHERITANCE

If Thomas's information⁷ is correct there are considerable variations in the pattern of inheritance.

At Okpe the eldest son takes all the property, with obligation to provide wives for his brothers. Failing sons, a daughter inherits and, in the case of a childless man, his brothers. Widows who have borne children go free.

At Somorika, while the senior son takes the first and largest share, the rest divide the remainder of the property equally, and they may agree to give something to their father's brothers. The latter are the heirs of a man without sons, "the next heirs are the father and mother(?); then the gravediggers and the mother's family".

At Ibillo, on the other hand, the senior son takes the largest share and other sons and daughters share equally. The deceased's brother has the right to receive the marriage-payment for his daughters, though he must share it with the "family". If one of the sons is dead his brothers and descendants inherit "by families".

At Ososo the inheritance pattern is apparently more unusual. The eldest child, male or female, is said to take the house and half the movable property, the other half going to "own brothers" of the deceased. "The goats and some of the cows and half the farm go to the child; oil palms bought by the deceased go to the brother; those inherited are divided. The same rule applies to bought and inherited land; it should be noted that the son takes all the land if the own brother is dead but has left children, and if one of the sons is dead, the inheritance goes to the other sons and to his children *per capita*, i.e., equally." Debts are payable by the brother of the deceased.

* Rowling, 1948.

⁷ 1910 (1), pt. I, pp. 70, 83-5.

At Somorika a posthumous child takes a share of the property over which the mother is made guardian. She cannot, however, be called to account for it.

THE LIFE CYCLE

BIRTH

Very little information is available concerning the birth customs of the North-West Edo. Of Okpe, Thomas says:—"They make a medicine for the first conception. A woman comes to help and, after the child is born, they give two calabashes to small children, who knock them seven times. They bury the placenta outside and the woman washes there for seven days. As soon as the cord falls they mark the child with black stuff and take it into the open air. When it is five months old the mother cuts its hair; a name is given by the father, or by anyone else who is present at the birth, on the day of the birth.

"A child's milk teeth are thrown on the roof; it is unlucky for children to be born with teeth; all spat when I mentioned the subject and denied that children born in Okpe had teeth till some time after they had come into the world."

MARRIAGE

It is not clear whether the alternative forms of marriage practised by the Etsako are found among the North-West Edo. Thomas's information suggests that rights in *uxorem* are more in accord with *isomi* than with *amoya* marriage, but he makes no statement concerning the affiliation of children.

At Okpe girls are betrothed in infancy, the suitor presenting cowries, palm-oil, and firewood to the father. He must then work for the father and make a marriage-payment of 10s. (this was in 1910). If the girl refuses to marry him the payment is refunded. If the girl runs away after marriage, however, there is no refund if she goes to her father's house and only half is refunded if she goes with another man. The body of a woman who has married outside Okpe must be brought back home for burial. It is interesting to note that clitoridectomy, which is practically universal among Edo-speaking peoples, is said not to be practised at Okpe.

According to Thomas, Ososo girls were in his time married at a very early age. Marriage-payment was refunded, with the consent of the "chief" if the girl disliked her husband, the elders arbitrating to decide the amount, but nothing was repayable if the girl had borne a child. Widows are free to return to their families and the payment for a second marriage is the same as for a first. Ososo girls were said not to marry outside their own town.

Customs in respect of divorce appear to be similar at Somorika and the latter town is said to share with Okpe an unusual method of dealing with adultery. The aggrieved husband must commit adultery, in return, with the wife of the offender or with the latter's brother's or father's wife, and should he die before achieving retribution the obligation to do so descends to his own brother.

At Somorika, for their first marriages, all girls of the same age group are conducted to their husbands, from the house of a priest, at the same time.⁸ In contrast with the custom among most Edo-speaking peoples in some of the North-West Edo (and perhaps some of the Etsako) communities the girl is taken to her husband by his own friends, perhaps his age-company, rather than by her own family.

It is reported that among some North-West Edo communities marriage is permitted between half-siblings with the same father.

DEATH AND MORTUARY RITES

Mortuary rites differ considerably from community to community.⁹ Common features appear to be processions, often of a warlike character, sacrifices, and the

⁸ A similar custom is said to prevail among the Avianwu and Ukpila tribes of Etsako.

⁹ For details see Thomas, 1929 (2); also 1910 (1), pt. I. sect. II.

provision of goats, cloths, etc., by sons-in-law. As among other sections of the Edo-speaking peoples the types of mortuary rites differ according to the status of the deceased. When a man dies away from home some object is taken to represent him and buried with the usual rites.

In many communities an image is made from sticks and clothes and erected on the roof of the deceased's house and in some, at least, it is carried in procession round the town.¹⁹

Graves are in some places dug inside the house. At Somorika, however, there is a special graveyard on the top of the hill from which the people have descended, with areas set aside for different categories of persons. Each grave is marked with a small stone alongside which a pot or enamel basin is placed in which small offerings are regularly made.

Shaving the head is a common sign of mourning for relatives.

¹⁹ A similar custom is found at N. Ihie, Ekeko

THE INEME

LOCATION, NOMENCLATURE, AND LANGUAGE

The Ineme (*Uneme* or *Uleme*) inhabit a number of villages in the northern and south-eastern parts of the Kukuru Division, widely scattered, and separated from each other by the territory of various Etsako and North-West Edo communities. They are undoubtedly an intrusive element in the population of this area and probably represent a more recent migration from the vicinity of Benin. The Ineme are united by common traditions of origin, by their traditional craft as smiths, in their dialect, and in certain other social and cultural features. In a sense they represent an endogamous caste, for their non-Ineme neighbours refuse to intermarry with them. Other Ineme settlements are to be found in Ishan, parts of North-Eastern Yoruba country and in the neighbouring parts of Northern Nigeria.

The name of these people seems to be derived from *ileme*, a rarely used and possibly archaic Benin word for "blacksmith." A short sample of vocabulary from Ineme-Ogbe suggests that the dialect there may be closer to Edo proper than the dialects of neighbouring North-West Edo communities. It is not known, however, how far Ineme dialects differ from village to village.

DEMOGRAPHY

	Village	Wards	Population
Southern Ineme	Alagbeta	5	2,497
	Imiava	2	
	Udochi North	3	
	Udochi South	3	
	Uzauu	2	
Northern Ineme	Ineme-Ogbe	3	?
	Ineme-Ekpe	5	1,416
	Egeni	3	809
	Ineme-Oss	7	427
	Eturu	7	714
Total (without Ineme-Ogbe)			5,863

MAIN FEATURES OF ECONOMY

The Southern Ineme depend to a large extent upon fishing and trading in the Niger creeks. The people of Alagbeta, for example, do little farming and play a very small part in the palm-produce industry. At Alagbeta there is a U.A.C. trading factory and an important market.

The Northern Ineme, living away from the rivers, depend for subsistence upon farming and palm-oil production. A large proportion of the men are blacksmiths and they are to be found widely scattered among the towns of Kukuru and Ishan and farther afield among the Igbara of Kabba Province, in Kabba town and in other parts of Yoruba country. Formerly they smelted their own ore, but they no longer do so.

The Northern Ineme women, like those of neighbouring communities, are expert weavers on upright looms of both locally-grown cotton and imported yarns.

TRADITIONS OF ORIGIN AND HISTORY

The Ineme probably migrated to this area at a later date than neighbouring peoples. This is suggested both by their own traditions and by their anomalous position in respect of land tenure (see below). They are reported to be descended

from a group of blacksmiths from Obadan in Benin Division who fled from the wrath of an *Oba*. They settled first at Inyele in what is now Asaba Division and later at Ugboha in Ishan, where there are still some Ineme. Little is known of their subsequent history or of the manner or order in which the present settlements were formed. It is interesting to note that the names of certain *egware*¹ (wards) within the northern villages are the same as the names of some of the southern villages. This suggests either that the northern villages are composite settlements containing elements from different southern villages or that the latter are derived from particular *egware* in the northern villages. Traditions collected by government officers in 1911-15 suggest the latter since they indicate that all the Ineme formerly lived in the north. Mr. D. P. Stanfield, who lives in Kukuruku Division, supports this view and suggests that the southern villages were probably founded after 1865 by Ineme who had crossed and recrossed the Niger. But much fragmentation and regrouping appears to have taken place during the latter half of the 19th century as a result of Nupe raids.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND POLITICAL SYSTEM

KINSHIP AND TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION

Each Ineme village is sub-divided into wards (*egware*), each of which appears to be associated with a particular descent-group; most names of *egware* have the prefix *imi*, "children of." The Ineme, like the Etsako, practice alternative forms of marriage and the likelihood is that these descent-groups are to some extent bilateral.

Egware in different villages often bear the same name which suggests that they may be, in some sense, dispersed clans. Among the Southern and Northern Ineme respectively 15 and 25 *egware* have only 10 and 11 names between them, and Iniava, Udochi, and Uzanu, the names of southern villages, are also the names of northern *egware*. However, the *egware* of a single village often claim common descent from the founder of the village.

AGE-SETS

Among the Southern Ineme new age-sets for males are formed every fourth year and attached to one of the companies *obisua*, *obiode*, and *obiyan* (*ogubo*).² A man must have eight sets junior to him before he can become *iduwoli*. Among the Northern Ineme new sets are formed about every seven years.

TITLE-ASSOCIATIONS

Igeru is a rank among the Northern Ineme which qualifies a man for an individual title and political office. At Ineme-Ekpe its achievement involves passing through four grades by paying fees to existing members and providing feasts. *Iduwoli* is a similar rank among the Southern Ineme. In order to acquire it a man must have married an *amoya* wife and completed the funeral rites of his father. The latter involves feasting the whole village and making presents to important individuals. At Alagbeta a payment of £20 to the existing *iduwoli* has been substituted.

Only a senior son has the right to "bury" his father though, if he should refuse, his junior brother might step in. If the senior son dies after becoming *iduwoli* his next surviving brother may take the title by paying about £2. Udochi had 10 *iduwoli* in 1938, Alagbeta many more.

¹ This word seems to be the same as Benin *egwas* and Ishan *egware* meaning a chief's house, compound, ward, or village.

² Cf. Ibibosakon, Etsako, Ishan.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The authority structure is based on a combination of age, title-association membership, and individual titles.

Among the Southern Ineme the most important title is *oliola*. Its holder is the village headman in Alagbeta—where the title is said to descend by primogeniture in the male line, Udochi, where it is the prerogative of one *egware* (which has branches in North and South Udochi); and in Uzanu, where it alternates between the two *egware*. In all these villages the second most important title is *onolu*. At Alagbeta the *onolu* is chosen from a specified *egware* by the elders and with the approval of the *oliola* and the candidate must pay fees to validate his position; he has charge of the *ukpi* drum (cf. certain Etsako tribes). At Udochi the title is confined to one *egware* and at Uzanu it goes to a member of the alternative *egware* to that of the current *oliola*.

Other titles are *erame*, whose holder is priest of *agumi* (*ogū?*), the principal deity of Ineme—a hereditary title at Alagbeta and confined to one *egware* at Udochi; *otaru*, and *akewaze* at Alagbeta only—a priest who sacrifices on behalf of the *erame* and who is the oldest member of a segment of one *egware*.

Apart from these individual titles each village has *edi*, who are usually the oldest men of certain *egware*; they are generally four in number.

Village councils consist of the village head, title-holders, *edi*, and *idnewoli*. The *onolu* performs executive functions (cf. the same title among other sections of the Edo-speaking peoples, where it is frequently linked with age-grade leadership).

North and South Udochi form one political unit and Imiava is closely associated with Alagbeta; Uzanu is apparently independent.

Among the Northern Ineme the political organization is rather different. At Ineme-Ogbe and Ineme-Osu the village head is the oldest man of specified *egware* and at Egeni the oldest man in the village. Individual titles are held by the oldest men in each *egware* and there are other titles whose location is unknown; all were vacant in 1938. In Northern Ineme *idnewoli* is a collective name for these title-holders.

The village council is composed of the village heads and *idnewoli* and, including, at Ineme-Ogbe, a priest, *otaru*. Each village is an independent political unit.

At the present day Southern Ineme are a part of the Etsako Federation and Northern Ineme of the Akoko-Igara Federation.

LAW AND ORDER

Formerly disputes were settled at the level of the smallest segment to which both parties belonged. The senior members of the village council gave decisions in cases brought before them at the house of the village head. Both parties paid fees in advance; the successful party had his refunded and the rest were divided by the *iregware* (sharers) among the judges. The *idnewoli* were responsible for enforcing decisions by seizing livestock, poultry, etc., and they retained a portion of what they seized. Oaths and ordeals were used to establish the "facts" where other evidence was doubtful or conflicting.

LAND TENURE

The Ineme appear to have few undisputed claims to the ownership of either land or water. The fishing-ponds which the Southern Ineme use are disputed with the Uzia, Ekperi, and Ifeku people, and most of the Northern Ineme share their farming and palm-produce rights with neighbouring North-West Edo communities. "Ineme-Ekpe has little land to which it can claim absolute ownership though it has farming rights over about 10 sq. miles . . . Ineme-Ogbe has occupational rights over about 5 sq. miles of land but shares the land and palm products in common with the Akoko [Akuku?] people. . . . Egeni has about 10 sq. miles, most of which

is shared in common with the neighbouring village of Osi. . . . Ineme-Osu has about 30 sq. miles, but Dagbala lays claim to ownership of most of this."² This situation does not appear to have caused much friction, but in recent years the increasing importance of palm-produce has resulted in a desire to establish boundaries which were formerly vague.

LIFE CYCLE

MARRIAGE

The same forms of marriage are found as among the Etsako, viz., *amoya*, *isumi*, and *onabo*. The marriage-payment for daughters of *isumi* marriages is shared by the "families" of the father and mother, the latter receiving the greater portion.

Onabo marriages were presumably contracted between members of different Ineme villages, for intermarriage with non-Ineme communities, at least among the Northern Ineme, is frowned upon by both sides. The North-West Edo try to prevent their women coming into contact with Ineme men. At Somorika, according to one informant, an Ineme man may be invited to sit down in the house but when he has departed the place where he sat must be purified with fire before a woman has a chance to sit there. Nor should a Somorika woman bathe in a stream where an Ineme man might see her. Similar restrictions are placed upon their own women by the Ineme. They do, however, intermarry freely with Benin people.

² Rowling, 1948, p. 17.

IV. THE URHOB0 AND ISOKO OF THE NIGER DELTA¹

LOCATION AND NOMENCLATURE

The main body of the peoples dealt with in this section is located in the north-western part of the Niger Delta, mainly in the present-day Urhobo Division of Delta (formerly Warri) Province. They occupy an area of about 2,000 square miles bounded on the north by the Benin kingdom, on the east by the Ibo and the Niger River, on the south by the Ijaw and Forcados Rivers, and on the west by the Itsekiri country. The pockets of Edo-speakers in Rivers Province are probably most closely related to the Isoko.

According to the 1952 Census bulletin there are just under 340,000 Urhobo and Isoko in Delta Province, nearly 28,000 in Benin Province, and 43,000 in Ondo Province. Another 25,000 are scattered through the oil-palm belt of Western Nigeria and others are found as far afield as the Ndop Plain of Bamenda Province in the Cameroons.

There is no satisfactory single term to cover all these Edo-speaking peoples in the Niger Delta area. "Sobo", a term often indiscriminately applied to the Urhobo and Isoko, is a corruption of "Urhobo" much disliked by the people themselves. The latter term is preferred but there is evidence to show that there are not only linguistic and cultural differences between the Urhobo and Isoko groups but also a feeling of unity among Isoko-speakers as opposed to the Urhobo proper. Both groups are called "Biotu", "people of the interior", by the Ijaw of the Forcados River area but this, too, is regarded as a contemptuous designation. The name "Igabo", by which the neighbouring Kwale Ibo refer to the Isoko, was taken up by the Europeans until it was discovered to be extremely offensive. It seems advisable then to speak simply of the "Urhobo and Isoko peoples" to distinguish them from other Edo-speaking groups and from their Itsekiri, Ijaw, and Ibo neighbours.

Neither the Urhobo nor the Isoko have ever formed a single social, political, or linguistic unit. They are a collection of autonomous and semi-autonomous local communities of diverse origins and with differences in economy, social organization, and dialect. On the other hand they have many social and cultural features in common and their dialects are more closely related to each other than to other Edo dialects; at the present day they have a well-marked feeling of unity. At the same time they are, in certain cultural and sociological features, not easily distinguishable from some of their neighbours, particularly the Kwale and Riverain Ibo. They share with them such institutions as title-associations and the use of the *efe* stick (in the case of the Isoko) under the same name and for similar purposes. There is, too, some evidence that Urhobo-Isoko language and culture have been spreading and absorbing formerly Ibo, Ijaw, and possibly Itsekiri elements.

For the purpose of this Survey, then, we divide the Edo-speaking peoples of the Niger Delta into two groups, on a mainly linguistic basis:—

1. The Urhobo, consisting of 18 tribes and chiefdoms living in the western part of the area.

2. The Isoko, consisting of 17 tribes and chiefdoms living in the eastern part of the area. Included here are the Erohwa of the Patani Creek area whose dialect is apparently very divergent.

LANGUAGE

According to Hubbard² there are five mutually unintelligible languages of Edo

¹ Much of the information in this section is derived from unpublished sources, principally Welch, "The Isoko Clans" and manuscript notes by administrative officers. Detailed references to these are given in the bibliography, p. 168.

² *The Sobo of the Niger Delta*, pp. 136-9 and *passim*.

type in the western half of the Niger Delta. They are Urhobo and Isoko, each spoken by a number of tribes in varying dialects, and Okpe, Erohwa, and Evrho (*E/ra*), spoken by the Okpe-Urhobo, Erohwa, and Uvbie tribes respectively. Hubbard considers that Erohwa is the earliest Edo language of the eastern part of the area and that Evrho is derived from it though modified by Urhobo influence. Okpe is said to be closer to the Edo of the Benin kingdom than are Urhobo dialects proper. In the major grouping given above and in the table that follows the Erohwa are included with the Isoko tribes while the Evrho (Uvbie tribe) and Okpe speakers are included with the Urhobo tribes; this has been done on a geographical rather than a linguistic basis. There is, however, evidence to suggest some mutual intelligibility between all these languages and dialects though Erohwa is probably very divergent from the rest.

The dialects of the small pockets of Edo-speakers in Owerri Province are probably more closely related to the Urhobo-Isoko cluster than to any other Edo dialects.

Hubbard describes Urhobo as a smooth-flowing language reminiscent of Ibo, in contrast to Isoko which is more staccato and in which stress plays an important part. Isoko, like some of the Etsako and North-West Edo dialects, has no nasal vowels. Both Urhobo and Isoko employ a number of consonant and consonant-combination phonemes which are absent from other Edo dialects but in this respect there are differences between the two groups; Isoko has dental *t* and *d* which are absent in Urhobo. Another difference is to be found in the tendency for Isoko-speakers to indicate tense by means of prefixes, whereas Urhobo generally relies on tone for this purpose. The Agbarho dialect is becoming the standard form of Urhobo but no predominant form of Isoko has yet emerged.

There are some Aboh-Ibo and Ijaw peoples who use Isoko and other Ijaw who use Urhobo as a second language.

DEMOGRAPHY AND SETTLEMENT PATTERN

URHOBOS		
<i>Tribe</i>	<i>Area</i> (square miles)	<i>Total</i> <i>Population</i> *
1. Agbarho		7,839
2. Ujevbe	110	20,207
3. Udu		16,022
4. Evbreni		3,116
5. Oloma	53	8,277
6. Ewu	190	11,480
7. Arhavbarien		1,173
8. Okparabe		1,304
9. Ughele		
10. Agbarha	160	17,719
11. Ogo		
12. Orogun		
13. Agbon		10,928
14. Abraka		30,678
15. Okpe-Urhobo		11,168
16. Uvbie		29,638
17. Oghara		5,976
18. Idjerbe (Jesse)		15,898
		16,515
Total		208,823

* The population figures are from the 1952 Census bulletin which includes two other items which cannot be accounted for from other sources. These are:—

(a) Usoro Clan, pop. 1,164.

(b) Ovbodokpokpor, 31 settlements, total pop. nearly 16,000.

In addition there were about 28,000 Urhobo-Isoko in Benin Province and 43,000 in Ondo Province.

Isoko		
19. Erohwa (Arokwa)		484
20. Okpe-Isoko		
21. Ozoro		8,722
22. Ofagbe		
23. Aviana		4,422
24. Iyede		3,388
25. Emevo	40	2,917
26. Euhwe (Okpoto)	30	5,579
27. Igbiide		5,057
28. Emede		5,517
29. Uwheru (Uwerun)		8,328
30. Owe		
31. Ebu		8,984
32. Olomoro		2,765
33. Usere		
34. Iri	30	14,586
35. Ole		3,300
Total		74,006

The Urhobo-Isoko live in compact settlements varying in population from less than 100 to, in one or two cases, more than 5,000 inhabitants; the great majority have populations of less than 500. In a few tribes the whole population is concentrated in one settlement but more typically the tribe comprises a number of villages and hamlets formed, according to tradition, by progressive proliferation from an original parent community.⁴

Each settlement consists of a number of houses and compounds arranged along or around one or more streets or central clearings. The typical compound consists of a number of rooms built on three sides of a rectangle with the fourth side open to the street or clearing, or screened from it by a wall or fence. Traditional houses are of mud on a framework of sticks with palm-thatched roofs.

TRADITIONS OF ORIGIN AND HISTORY

ORIGINS

On the basis of local traditions and linguistic evidence Hubbard⁵ has attempted to reconstruct the history of the Edo-speaking peoples of the Niger Delta in terms of the migration and mixing of peoples. He suggests that the distinctive characteristics of the various Urhobo and Isoko tribes are a result of the super-imposition of Ijaw, Ibo, and later Edo immigrants upon aboriginal strata already speaking Edo-type dialects. In the eastern part of the area the aborigines are to-day represented by the Erohwa whom he believes originally occupied the area round the Patani Creek, then spread northwards over the area now occupied by Isoko-speakers. The forerunners of the Urhobo spread southwards from the area of the Benin kingdom across the Ethiope River. At a later date Edo, Ibo, and Ijaw founders of the present-day Isoko and Urhobo tribes moved into the area and established their rule over the aborigines whom they eventually absorbed.

HISTORY

At some unknown date much of the Urhobo-Isoko country came under the rule of the *Oba* of Benin. Many of the *ivie* or "kings" of Urhobo and Isoko tribes had to seek confirmation of their titles from the *Oba* and some still express an intention to do so; the *Orodje* of Orerokpe (Okpe-Urhobo) received ceremonial swords

⁴ For details of relationships between settlement pattern and other forms of grouping see the sections on *Kinship* and *Political Organization* below.

⁵ *The Sobo of the Niger Delta*, *passim*.

from the *Oba* as late as the autumn of 1953. In most tribes, however, this practice has long been discontinued, though the *Oba* still retains some spiritual prestige in the area. The *ivie* of some other Isoko tribes owed allegiance to the *Obi* of Aboh.

The Niger Delta was first visited by Europeans—Portuguese—in the 15th century. Pereira's *Esmeralda* mentions the "Subou" in 1505 but there are few other references to these people by name. Early explorers and traders had more contact with the Itsekiri and Ijaw who lived closer to the main rivers. The slave-trade undoubtedly affected the Urhobo and Isoko considerably. They were a constant source of slaves for Itsekiri, Ijaw, and Edo raiders and they also raided each other but they did not themselves, apparently, sell direct to the Europeans.

At the beginning of the present century the British began to penetrate the country from the west and north-west with Warri and Sapele as their bases. At the same time they entered Isoko country from Ase and Patani in the south-east and from the Aboh area. It was at about this time that the Urhobo-Isoko began to play a major role in the palm produce industry though they were mentioned as being engaged in it by Baikie as early as 1854. To-day they are dominant in palm-oil production in western part of the Niger Delta.

NOTES ON INDIVIDUAL TRIBES*

1. Agbarho (more commonly spelt Agbadu): a village-group formed from elements of neighbouring Urhobo and Isoko tribes. They originally occupied a single settlement (Otovbodo) which later split into villages some of which themselves now have offshoots. The foundation of Otovbodo is said to have taken place not more than 150 years ago.

2. Ujevbe (*Ughēvbe* or *Ujēvbe*): the founder is said to have come from the Mein Ijaw tribe and to have been a brother of the founder of Ewu. There are four "districts" each named after its founder. Each comprises a number of villages.

3. Udu: said to be of Ijaw origin and to have close links with Ujevbe.

4. Evbreni (*Evvreni*): consists of two towns whose founders originated from Ibo country and settled on Uwheru, Iyede, and possibly Ewu land.

5. Olomu: of mixed Ibo and Benin origin, and probably including Mein Ijaw elements. According to tradition the Ibo founder of Olomu and the Edo founder of Okpe joined together for a time then separated, Olomu taking some of the Benin people with him. The original settlement (Otovbodo or Otorolomu), now defunct, is said to have consisted of two wards which have proliferated into about 15 villages.

6. Ewu (*Ewu*): the founder came with the founders of the Mein Ijaw and Ujevbe tribes from the Amassuama area of Brass Division and joined with a group called Ora from Benin. Apart from the parent community there are many villages scattered among the Mein along the Warri and Forcados Rivers and adjacent creeks. They were dispersed by Benin raiders. All settlements come together three times a year for rituals and all are affiliated in whole or in part to one of the original wards.

7. Arhavbarien (*Arkāvārīē*): the founder, of Onya (Ibo) origin, settled in Ewu for a time. Hubbard regards them as an offshoot of the Onya people who now speak Urhobo. The village of Uto-Arhavbarien is disputed between Ewu and Arhavbarien.

8. Okparabe (*Okparabē*): the founder came from the Kumbuowa group of Western Ijaw. He received a title from the *Oba* of Benin. There are two villages.

9-12. The Owha group comprises four tribes, Ogo (*Ogo*), Ughela, Agbarha, and Orogun, all of which are believed to have been founded by sons of Owha. They or their descendants were joined by Ijaw from the Tirakiri group. Ogo has three villages, Ughela 20, and Agbarha three village-groups of 13, five, and three villages.

13. Agbon (*Agbō*): four main village-groups interspersed with a few Itsekiri on the south bank of the Ethiops River and said to have been founded by the four sons of

* The origin and migration stories summarized here do not necessarily represent historical fact but they illustrate Hubbard's conception of the way in which the various tribes have developed. The data are from Hubbard and administrative reports together with corrections and suggestions from Mr. A. Salubi (personal communication).

Agbon, a native of Irivi in the Ase area. They were later joined by Benin people and came under the *Oba*.

14. Abraka: a group of villages, under an *ovie*, on the south bank of the *Ethiope*.

15. Okpe-Urhobo: has close historical links with Olomu. The founder, Igboze, is said to have been a son of the *Oba* of Benin who obtained the title *ovie* and conquered some of the aboriginal Urhobo. He was joined by the Ibo, Olomu, who persuaded Igboze to make him his heir. Disagreeing with this, followers of Igboze's son split off and settled on their present site south of Sapele, mixing with an Edo-speaking group.

16. According to Hubbard the Uvbie people who are now in the extreme west of the area migrated from Erohwa in the far south-east.

17. 18. Oghara and Idjerhe (Jesse) are north of the *Ethiope* River, the latter on land of the Benin kingdom.

19. The Erohwa tribe is, according to Hubbard, the remnant of the aboriginal Benin-speakers in the eastern part of the area.

20. Okpe-Isoko: scattered settlements formed from followers of Igboze's son who split off from the main body. Some communities are mixed with Ibo-speakers.

21. Ozoro (*Ozoro*) is said to have been founded by Okpe-Isoko people who absorbed some aboriginals. Five villages have been founded from Ozoro; some containing Ibo, and others Isoko elements. According to a different account the founder was the son of an *Oba* of Benin and the father of Okpe.

22. Ofagbe consists of a main village with three wards and a number of subsidiary settlements. It was probably founded from Ozoro. Ofagbe people are said to join the Ozoro tribe for certain ceremonies.

23. Aviara: said to have been founded from the Ase (Ibo) community which was itself part of the Onitsha and Aboh migration from Benin. The founders were joined by Erohwa aboriginals and others from Benin who came via Iyede. Hubbard lists 12 Aviara villages and three others containing Aviara elements.

24. Iyede is said to have been founded by three men from Benin who wished to set up their own kingdom. They were later joined by other Benin people, one of whom received the title, *ovie*, from the *Oba*. They were much scattered by civil war. Hubbard lists 16 main towns and villages including one which was originally an Aboh Ibo town which the Iyede conquered and occupied.

25. Emevo (*Emevo*): said to be closely related to Iyede. Migrants from Benin settled first at Emede, then on Iyede land, before moving to the present site where they were joined by a diviner and his followers from Oghara. There are six permanent villages and six farm hamlets apart from the parent town.

26. Enwhe (or Okpolo): the founders came down the Niger from Ibo country in company with the Evbreni people and settled near the aboriginal village, Uruiche, which later sought their protection. There is only one town.

27. Igvide was founded by Ibo, allegedly from Awka, who first settled near Erohwa. They moved with Uvbie people, then split off to form the present town and villages.

28. Emede was founded, according to tradition, by a son of the founder of Igvide. It became largely autonomous.

29. Uwheru: the founder and his family migrated from Amassuama (cf. Ewu) in the Ijaw country of the lower Niger Delta. Welch⁴ believes their present language to be Isoko but Hubbard regards it as being intermediate between Urhobo and Isoko.

30. Owe is said to have been founded from Benin by people who settled first at Igvide, then on Iyede land before moving to the present site. The village Otibio was founded by a group from Ugo in the Benin kingdom.

31. Elu represents a fission from Owe while the latter community was at Iyede. The founders absorbed aboriginal elements.

⁴ "The Isoko Clans." MS. Thesis.

32. Olomoro is an offshoot of Olomu traditionally founded by three brothers who broke away after a civil war. The tribe now speaks Isoko but till recently they still visited Olomu for annual sacrifices to the tribal deity. There are about 10 hamlets which are regarded as parts of the three original wards.

33. The founder of Usere is said to have fled from Benin and to have reached the present site by way of Isselle-Uku (Asaba Division) and the Niger and Forcados Rivers. The *ovie* title is said to have been given originally by the *Oba* but later to have been conferred within the tribe.

34. Iri was founded from one of the wards of Usere and became largely independent.

35. The Ole people came from the same ward of Usere. They invited some Okpe people to join them and the descendants of the latter are now in a majority.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Hubbard divides the part of the Niger Delta in which the Urhobo and Isoko live into four main geographical areas.

1. The extreme eastern area, about 100 square miles in extent, between the Ase and Niger Rivers, is low-lying, covered with swamp forest and palms, and most of the land is flooded in August and September. There are a number of Isoko-speaking villages mainly belonging to the Iyede, Okpe-Isoko, and Iri tribes.

2. The eastern area, about 300 square miles, lying to the west of the Ase River. This area is split up by two large swamps, running approximately N.N.E.-S.S.W., into three tracts of higher, drier territory:—

(a) The area between the Ase River and Bethel swamp which is dry in the low-water season. In the floods the centre remains dry but the northern and southern extremes are flooded. The main bodies of the Usere, Iri, Aviara, Okpe-Isoko, and Ofagbe tribes are located here.

(b) A roughly oval tract of land between the Bethel and Owe swamps which in the wet season becomes an island but is itself not water-logged. This, the most densely-populated part of the Isoko area, includes Ozoro, the largest Isoko town.

(c) The tract to the west of the Owe swamp where the Urhobo-Isoko linguistic boundary occurs. The Owe swamp, fed by rain water, is, however, a less considerable barrier than the river-fed Bethel swamp.

3. The "Sobo Plains." This is the name given to the flat country which extends from the Ethiope River between Abraka and Sapele and southwards through Urhobo country. The swamps are small in extent and no excessive flooding occurs. This area is mainly given over to cassava and yam farms and to oil-palms. In the north are the Agbon and Orogun groups. The southern end is divided into two parts by the Okpara Creek, south-east of which lie the Olomu, Ogo, and Agbarha groups and to the north-west of which are Udu, Ujevbe, Uvbie, Agbarho, and Ughele.

Country of the same kind extends north of the Ethiope River and here are located the Oghara and Idjerhe communities.

4. The southern area, about 200 square miles in extent, bounded on the south by the Forcados River. It is remote, almost entirely under water in the wet season and still waterlogged in the dry. The few villages are situated on the banks of the creeks. The main communities are Ewu, Arhavbarien, Okparabe, Uwheru, and Erohwa.

MAIN FEATURES OF ECONOMY

Farming, fishing, and the collection, preparation, and marketing of oil-palm produce are the chief economic activities of the Urhobo and Isoko.

AGRICULTURE

Yams and cassava are the main food crops, grown wherever the nature of the land permits, but particularly in the "Sobo Plains" area. Among the Isoko the

ekwe—elementary or compound family—and to a lesser extent the *we*⁷—the local extension of the *ekwe*⁷ along patrilineal lines—are the farming units.

Farming operations centre on the yam farms. Land to be cleared in any one year must have been fallow for three to seven years—this appears to be true over a large part of the Isoko-Urhobo country. It is divided afresh before clearing and the elders of the *we* decide on the order in which individual farms will be cleared, so that the whole working population of the *we* may help on each farm.

In the Ughеле-Agbarha area a man with one or two wives and their children is said to require to farm about three-quarters of an acre to produce enough food for family consumption for the year—but more if he wishes to have a surplus for sale. At Agbarho a family of similar size may farm up to five acres but one and a half acres is the average.

Corn, beans, peppers, and groundnuts are among the more important crops interplanted with yams. Groundnuts are grown over most of the Isoko area and are the staple crop at Uwheru, but they are said to be absent at Agbarho. Maize, interplanted with yams and sometimes with cassava, takes about four months to mature. All these are women's crops, but the woman's crop *par excellence* is cassava, which is grown along boundaries between farms and plots as well as in separate plots. It is usually planted on the previous year's yam farm before it is allowed to go back to fallow. The farm is hoed and weeded for three months at Ughеле until the plants are 3 ft. or 4 ft. high and is harvested in 12 to 17 months. Sugar-cane is planted on any spare ground and plantains and bananas are grown mainly around the villages.

The Isoko Farming Calendar

The Isoko recognize and name 13 lunar months, beginning when the floods are receding in mid-December—about the time of the onset of the harmattan. The names of the months (most of which appear to be closely related to the Isoko numerals), together with their associated farming activities, are as follows:—

1. *Duukpe*—the month of clearing (*egwuru*) and burning the bush—the latter is done mainly by the women. In Uwheru where only poor yams can be grown, groundnuts are planted in this month.
2. *Awe*—the above activities are completed and white yam (*ekoto*) and red yam (*ikpei*) are planted by men and women,⁸ together with maize, peppers, and beans, which are grown individually by the women on sections of the farm allotted to them.
3. *Asa*—the farms are weeded.
4. *Ane*—the maize begins to ripen and water yams planted the previous *Ekpe* (10th month) are harvested.
5. *Esoo*—the month of tornadoes. The corn is beginning to ripen.
6. *Azoza*—the rains begin and the farms are weeded for the second time.
7. *Ele*—maize, peppers, and beans are harvested.
8. *Aria*—early white yams are uprooted singly as they ripen, the heads being severed and buried to provide seed yams for the next planting. The cut yams are left on the ground under shelter.
9. *Ezie*—the month of heavy rains when the white yam crop is harvested.
10. *Ekpe*—land is cleared and water-yams are planted.
11. *Uyoro*—the red yam crop is gathered and the men repair the barns in preparation for storing it.
12. *Uruuwe*—the white and red yams are carried into the barns.
13. *Akufe* ("refuse")—the floods are at their height and farming operations are impossible.

The best farms are always on the higher land and the Isoko in the wetter parts

⁷ See below, p. 137, for a description of these groupings.

⁸ The planting of red and white yams and water yams appears to take place a month or two later among the Urhobo of the Ughеле area.

grow mainly water-yams on the river banks, between the flood seasons. In some areas—e.g., around Efru—the land is too infertile to support yams, and cassava is the main root-crop.

Yams are stored on wooden racks in the bush, in barns in the compounds, or between the roof-beams of the house. The owner of the farm normally gives shares to all who have helped him.

HUNTING AND FISHING

Hunting is normally in the hands of specialists (presumably part-time) who shoot and trap wild pigs, buffalo, deer, etc.

Though the Urhobo-Isoko are often regarded as the landmen of the Delta, in contrast to the Ijaw, Itsekiri, and Riverain Ibo, many of them are, in fact, fishermen. Fish are valued as food, and without them there can be no feast; they are, too, an essential part of many sacrifices. All Urhobo and Isoko towns have a stretch of creek or ponds but the main supply comes from the so-called "water-towns" (*ewame*). The people of the southern region and the swamps—Ewu, Uwheru, Aviara, Igbiide, Usere, and Erohwa—are the noted fishermen and expert canoe-men among the Urhobo and Isoko.

There are many methods of collecting fish, some of which are as follows:—

1. Holes are dug near to the creeks, joined up to them, then stopped and the water baled out—this mainly in the dry season. Other holes are dug in the dry season and become filled during the floods. This method is practised collectively by the members of an *eye* or of a quarter who share the fish. Some villages have large communal ponds.

2. Two kinds of nets are used by the riverside people:—

- (i). *Ogodogu*, a net with weights at the bottom and calabash floats at the top stretched across a creek between two canoes, then drawn up from the bottom.

- (ii). *Ogbe*, a throw-net with leaden weights round the circumference of the base which is thrown from a canoe.

3. Spears of up to five prongs.

4. Hooks baited with frogs, worms, etc., are placed at each end of a line stretched across the water or attached to floats, sometimes sprung with bamboo poles. The rod-line and hook method is used by young boys.

5. Fish-traps and barrages* are common in moving water. Barricades of wood, bamboos, palm-leaf mats, etc., are placed across a creek, leaving a narrow opening through which the fish are swept into a net. An area may be fenced off at high water so that when the floods recede the fish are left high and dry.

6. Baskets for prawns, etc., are dipped or fastened in the water.

7. Poison is said to be used in some Urhobo areas for killing fish.¹⁰

PALM PRODUCE

Products of the oil-palm are the primary cash-crop of the Urhobo and Isoko. Not only do they extract oil and kernels in their own territory but they have camps throughout most of Benin Province, in Ondo and Owerri Provinces, and in other areas. This practice of going abroad to earn money is known as *ukane*¹¹ by the Isoko. A party is formed—and in this case the economic grouping may not be so strictly along kinship lines as in farming or fishing—which seeks permission from the landowners in a suitable area to build a camp and gather the bunches of palm fruit known as "bangars." Rent is paid for the land and the party settle down

* See Hubbard, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-8, for a description of a fish-barrage. Also the photograph facing page 37.

¹⁰ Personal communication from M. C. Atkinson.

¹¹ The word is apparently derived from *Ikale*, the area in the southern part of Ondo Province in which large numbers of Urhobo and Isoko have settled. Thus *Okp'ukane* means "he has gone to Ikale." (Personal communication from Mr. A. Salubi.)

for an indefinite period, perhaps permanently. They may give their daughters in marriage to the landowning group though the reverse is very unusual in Benin, Yoruba, and Ibo country. Normally, however, they retain contact with their home, returning for marriage, funeral ceremonies, etc., and perhaps permanently when enough profit has been made.

Women are responsible for the extraction of palm-kernels, the rest of the work being in men's hands. At Agbarho—and this seems to be true for other Urhobo areas—"bangars" are collected on an average of 12 days per month in three periods of eight days over two months. An energetic man may collect as many as 30 in a day, but the average is said to be about 12; such an average in a year will produce, it is said, a little over one puncheon (13 cwt. or 180 gallons) of oil and 56 bushels of palm-kernels.

After the cutting period, the fruits are softened under a leaf cover in the sun for a few days before being stripped off and rubbed on a bamboo rack to remove husks and dirt. They are then thrown into a large wooden trough (called *okedi* or "oil-canoe" by the Urhobo), 12-15 ft. long with a sloping bottom and a plug at the lower end. When it is about half full three or four men tread the fruits until they are reduced to a pulp consisting of nuts, hairy integument, and oil. Friends often help each other during this part of the operation. The oil is scooped out of the lower end into a calabash or kerosene tin (in some troughs the plug-hole is fitted in a position from which the palm-oil can be drained off), water is added to the remaining pulp and it is retreaded, sometimes in sections, the oil being collected from the surface of the water. The oil is then boiled to remove impurities which collect as a scum or sediment. After these operations, which may take three or four days, the nuts are handed over to the women who extract the kernels for their own economic benefit. The remaining shells are used for fuel or for gravel, and, mixed with sand and cement, produce a strong concrete.¹²

CRAFTS

Canoe-building¹³ is a major industry at Ikipidiana, a town of Ozoro and Okpe origin on Onya land close to the Niger. The canoes are made from the trunks of local hardwood trees which are carved to the correct shape and hollowed out with axes, adzes, and matchets. The hollowing is done through a longitudinal slit about 6 ins. wide. Later, while the trunk is heated over a fire, the slit is forced open by a party of men with forked sticks; in this way the bows and stern are formed. Transverse struts are inserted to keep the sides apart and the operation may have to be repeated several times until the required width is obtained. The canoe is then tested for stability and water-tightness and necessary adjustments are made. The Ujevbe and other Urhobo and Isoko peoples also make canoes for which there is a good market in the Delta and along the length of the Niger.

Pottery, basketry, and mat-making are widespread. The raphia-palm supplies palm-wine, leaves for roofing, and fibre for rope and for weaving into sleeping-mats. The central stems of the leaves furnish wattles for houses and punting-poles for canoes.

There appears to be little or no cloth-weaving at the present day, though the craft probably existed in the past. Hausa cloth is imported for working clothes and European cloth for other purposes. Raphia is woven into mats in some areas. Smithing is always in the hands of resident Ibo blacksmiths from Awka in Onitsha Province.

Art

The Urhobo and Isoko carve wooden staffs and figures and "Janus Head"

¹² In recent years the Western Regional Production Development Board has begun to erect "Pioneer Oil Mills" in the area, to which individuals can bring their palm kernels for crushing.

¹³ See Hubbard, *The Sobo of the Niger Delta*, pp. 19-21.

masks, surmounted by animals and worn on the head. From mud or clay they sculpt individual figures and groups of figures for the shrines of their spirits and deities.

MARKETS AND TRADE

Markets (*eki* in Isoko) are held every four days in regular market-places (*ekitawo*) in most towns and villages; there are also some larger markets every eight days, attended by men and women traders from all over the Urhobo-Isoko country. Some of the larger ones are at Kakpamre and Oto-Ujevbe in the Ujevbe tribal area, Agbarho, Ole, Igide, and Ivrogbo (Usere tribe). The last is the port for all the Isoko area and a big centre of the palm-produce trade. Usere is a big fish market, particularly busy in March and April. Nowadays, many Urhobo trade in the markets outside their own territory—in Warri, Sapele, Onitsha, and farther afield.

Barter, as a system of trade, continued well into the present century and may still go on in some areas. It is mainly concerned with the exchange of agricultural produce for fish between Urhobo-Isoko and Ijaw traders. Igide was one of the main centres of this kind of trade.

The markets exist mainly for the sale of surplus local food products, for the palm-oil and kernels trade, and for the retailing of European cloths and other trade goods. Hausa traders bring cottons and trinkets from the north. Local variations in production capacity create a lively trade over small areas; in general the country seems to be short of yams which are imported in large quantities from Onitsha and beyond. Palm produce is the most important cash crop, but there is no detailed information as to what happens to it between production and sale to the European trading stations. Other important cash crops are cocoa, rubber, and timber, all in the drier areas.

Welch has described the market at Ole as being organized by the *otu eweya* (adult woman's age-grade) of Ole, who make small charges to market women who require permanent pitches. It is their task to purify the market if any market woman dies in pregnancy, in which case the next market is held outside the town.

The rivers and creeks are still, to a large extent, the trade-routes of the area, but there is a rapidly increasing use of motor-transport in the drier areas where there are good roads.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND POLITICAL SYSTEM

KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY

The kinship terminology, as among the other Edo-speaking peoples, is of a simple kind, built up from a few primary forms. Some of the terms are as follows:—

ISOKO ¹⁴	UKHOB0	ENGLISH
<i>ase me</i>	<i>ase</i>	father
<i>oni me</i>	<i>oni</i>	mother
<i>omidwo me</i>	<i>omoni</i>	sibling (same mother)
<i>(am) asewo me</i>	<i>amase</i>	sibling (same father)
<i>amw me</i>	<i>amw</i>	child (son or daughter)
<i>ase ologbo me</i>	<i>asemwode or ebabode</i>	grandfather (paternal or maternal)
<i>oni ologbo me</i>	<i>onirade</i>	grandmother (paternal or maternal)
<i>omidwo ase me</i>	<i>omonirani</i>	father's sibling (same mother)
<i>asewo ase me</i>	<i>omonirase</i>	father's sibling (same father)
<i>amw amidwo me</i>	<i>amwido or amwase</i>	sibling's child
	<i>aye (pl. eya)</i>	wife
	<i>asara</i>	husband
	<i>asetasara</i>	husband's father
	<i>aga</i>	in-laws (general term)
	<i>ayomoni</i>	brother's wife
	<i>ayomase</i>	
	<i>ophrophro oni</i>	mother's partner—i.e., father's wife

OPHROPHRO ONI ME

¹⁴ In this column the terms are followed by the possessive pronoun *me* = "my."

The terms *omaze* (male) and *omote* (female) are used in Isoko to denote the sex of the relative referred to if this is not otherwise evident. *Osare* and *omote* are the equivalent words in Urhobo. The terms *oniso* and *omoni* appear to be used when siblings have the same father and mother.

The primary kinship terms are extended over a wide range of relatives on both the maternal and paternal sides. Siblings of the same father and mother are often called *ase* and *oni*, and their children receive the same form of address as own siblings. The word *omo* is prefixed in Isoko when it is desired to make clear that the speaker's real sibling is referred to. The father's wife is never called *oni* unless she has adopted the child.

THE RULE OF DESCENT

Descent is established through the father, who passes on his property, duties, and rights, and sometimes his status, to his eldest son or, if the latter should be a minor, to his own brother until the son is of age. Patrilineages of varying depth and range form the nucleus of family and local groupings, but there is not enough information available to decide to what extent the system is segmentary.

Illegitimate children live with their mother when small, but the genitor can claim his son later on, perhaps after he has paid compensation to the woman's father or husband. If a betrothed girl bears a daughter to a man other than her future husband, the genitor, provided he has paid compensation to the husband, may claim the marriage-payment when the daughter is herself married.

If the mother of a child dies her sister usually takes care of it in infancy. If the father dies his eldest son or brother becomes *aseme* to the children. The father's sister is said to be a more important figure than the mother's brother for the Isoko child.

KINSHIP AND TERRITORIAL GROUPINGS

The following, according to Welch, are the local groups among the Isoko.

1. *Ekwé*. The elementary or compound family, consisting of a man with his wife or wives and their offspring, living together in one compound. The house is built on three sides of a rectangle, with an open space or fence on the fourth side adjacent to the village street. The head of the family lives in the house opposite this and his wives and children in rooms along the other two sides. The kitchens, too, are in these blocks, sometimes behind the wives' rooms. In each compound are an *oyise* shrine¹¹ and a well.

2. *Uye*. The *uye* is a territorially compact extended family with a patrilineal nucleus of varying generation depth. Welch did not hear the names of more than three generations of ancestors mentioned in ancestor worship within the *uye*. The *uye* is said to be the most important unit in the individual's social life, at birth, puberty, death, litigations, etc. All the adult members of the *uye* discipline its children and the most important sanctions for proper behaviour are fear of the ancestors and of bringing shame upon the whole *uye*. There is little information concerning the pattern of authority within the *uye*; it is not, for instance, clear whether age or seniority of descent is a main determinant.

3. *Ogbe*. This is the local extension of the *uye* along patrilineal lines to form a ward of a town or village. The *ogbe* is further discussed below in the section on political organization.

Above this level there is little information on the role of kinship in the social system. In certain cases, villages and the tribe as a whole appear to correspond to patrilineages or patrilclans, but often the component units are of diverse origin and descent.

¹¹ See p. 159, below.

AGE-GRADES (*otù*)

Both men and women are grouped in age-grades among the Urhobo and Isoko.

Men's Age-grades

There is considerable variation between communities in the names, number, and composition of age-grades. As among other Edo-speaking peoples there is a broad threefold division: young boys, adult men—the working, fighting, and executive grades; the elders, who are too old to work.

The general pattern among the Isoko is said to be as follows. Up to the age of 10 boys born within three-year intervals form play-groups which later move in a body through the various grades. The grades are:—

1. *Emaha*: boys of 10 to 16 who sweep the quarter and village streets and clear bush paths.

2. *Iurawa*:¹⁶ (a) *Iurawa* (16–21), who clear main roads, bail out fish ponds, build roads, and meeting-houses. (b) *Iurawa udevie*, who do similar but more skilled work. They cut timber, roof meeting-houses, etc. (c) *Iurawa ologbo*, normally the overseers of the work done by the above two sub-grades. If heavy work must be done urgently, they will join in.

3. *Ekpako*: the elders who are excused communal work.

The *emaha* grade seems to be found throughout the Isoko area, though in Owe and Agbon it is called *otu nyara* (? *iurawa*), and in Eia *otu omogbe*. In Agbarho it is *otu imitefe*, but in some Urhobo groups boys of this age are said to form a part of *iurawa*. This last, the working grade, seems to have two sub-divisions among most Urhobo communities. The junior is usually called *iurawa* (with dialectal variations), but in the Ughale, Ogo, and Agbarha groups this name is given to the senior section, while the junior is called *uvbie*, *ururue*, and *otuoere* respectively. The senior sub-division goes by the various names of *iurawa ologbo* (Olomoro, Enhwe), *otukpoko* (Ewu, Ujevbe), *ighele* (Agbon), *otu ologbo* (Eia), and *olotu* (Usere, Owe, Emovor, and Okparabe). The *ekpako* grade appears to be universal. At Erohwa, with its very divergent dialect, there are four grades, *imibilimo* (up to 16), *imowe* (16–30), *ibiblede* (30–55), and *okpakuewu*.

The age-grades appear to be organized primarily on a ward basis. The head of the working grade in each ward is called *olotu*. It appears from the above that in some tribes all the *iletu* together are regarded as constituting a separate grade. In Okpe and Ozoro they have their own well-organized council. The *iletu* are usually chosen by the ward-head, with general consent, on the basis of strength, ability, and bravery; small gifts to the *ekpako* may be necessary on appointment. In Ozoro a goat is sacrificed and wine is poured over the *olotu*'s staff of office; here he has an *otota* (spokesman) and *akpoko* (assistant).

In some communities (especially Isoko) there is a senior *olotu* or *olotu ologbo* for the whole autonomous group. He was formerly the head of the warriors and had both administrative and judicial powers. At Ozoro he has an *otota-olotu* (spokesman) and *akpoko-ologu* (assistant). According to Welch he is appointed by the *iletu* and given a staff of office by the *edio*.¹⁷ In Ozoro he is appointed by the *edio* and there are certain rites to be performed at his installation. On being appointed *edio* he may or may not relinquish his title, according to his wish.

It is not known in what way individuals and groups pass from grade to grade or whether any ritual is involved, though in Okpe a new *okpako* pays 2s. to the senior *okpako* and provides a goat for sacrifice.

The political and judicial functions of the *otu* and *iletu* and their part in the military organization are discussed elsewhere (see pp. 143–5).

¹⁶ Or *iphrawa*.

¹⁷ See section on title associations, below.

Women's Age-grades

Almost everywhere there appear to be three *otu* for women.

1. *Otu emete*¹⁸ (girls): variously said to consist of uncircumcised or of circumcised but unmarried girls. They appear to have no specific communal duties outside the compound.

2. *Otu eweya*¹⁹ (*eya* = women): said to include all circumcised or all married women. In Olomu women married in their own villages are said to be less important in the *otu* than those who come from outside; here they may exercise against the men the final sanction of leaving in a body and settling in a neighbouring village which will thereupon demand compensation for keeping them. In Ozoro they exercise their authority through meetings and demonstrations.

The *eweya* are the guardians of all ritual surrounding childbirth, though in some tribes they appear to be subsidiary to the old women in this. In Ewu they see that the necessary purification rites are carried out at the birth of twins, stillbirths, deaths in childbirth, etc., and they may claim compensation if they are not properly performed. They and the old women are responsible for the care of fertility shrines and for seeing that taboos affecting women are kept. They also enforce laws concerning markets and farming. Among the Isoko each ward has its *okpak*, *olotu*, and *otota*. In Urhobo groups the leader is the *otota*.

3. *Otu emetogbe* (daughters of the ward): in Olomu, Ujevbe, and Agbarbo this grade is said to consist mainly of widows—those who were married in their own village and those who have returned home to it. They voice their opinions through the *eweya*, though they may intercede between the latter and the men in a serious dispute. In other groups the old women, variously called *ekwakweya*, *akpakwaya*, or *kpokweverawu* (in Erohwa this *otu* includes all women past the age of child-bearing), have more definite duties; they sacrifice at the women's fertility shrines, regulate markets, etc. At Agbon the *otu eweya* are led by the *onotu*, the oldest among them, who controls the market, and they are responsible for tackling epidemics believed to be caused by sorcery.

TITLE-ASSOCIATIONS

Among the Urhobo and Isoko, as among the Western Ibo and Northern Edo, title-associations are an important feature of the social organization. The following description of some of these associations is concerned with their distribution and internal structure; their political role will be discussed below under political organization.

From the information available it is by no means always clear in terms of what kinds of local groupings the associations function. In most tribes there appears to be a single association and this seems to be true particularly of tribes where the inhabitants of derived settlements (see pp. 130-2) are regarded as belonging to one or other of the wards of the parent community. Where villages and hamlets are more autonomous, however, each may have its own title-association.

*The Odi Association*²⁰

Odi is probably the most widespread title-association; it is found throughout the Isoko country and among the Urhobo of Evbreni. It does not occur among the Owha group, Olomu, Okparabe, Ewu, Ujevbe, Agbon, or Agbarbo; there is no information about the other Urhobo communities. In Erohwa the same association is called *diorowawono*.

¹⁸ *Iworo* in Erohwa—uncircumcised girls.

¹⁹ *Eversu* in Erohwa—circumcised women still of child-bearing age. *Uwoghweyane* in Olomoro, *wowweyane* in Eshwe.

²⁰ Among other branches of the Edo-speaking peoples the *edi* (*edĩ*) are the senior age-grade.

Odio has two grades, *okoro* and *odio*. The *okoro* title can be and is, in most places, taken by every freeborn male in the community—in Ozoro by anyone whose father or mother is a native—on the payment of a small fee²¹ which is shared by the *odio* and sometimes by the other *okoro*. At Ozoro a libation of palm-wine is poured to the spirits of departed *odio* and the *odio ologbo* (the head of the association in the community) draws small chalk lines on the candidate's right arm. Most fathers seem to obtain the title for their sons in boyhood or infancy, or even in the womb; seniority in the *odio* association depends on the date when the title was obtained.

In the tribes for which detailed information is available, there appears to be a single *odio* association for the whole tribe. The numbers of *odio* proper are strictly limited, but vary widely from tribe to tribe. Thus, Usere is said to have nine—three from each ward—and this appears to be the most usual number; but Olomoro has 27—nine from each of three wards, Iyede has one from each of 13 villages and Aviana has nine, who are the nine senior members, irrespective of ward.

When an *odio* dies he is normally replaced by the senior *okoro* (*okpako okoro*)—by title-age—from the appropriate local unit, but at Ozoro anyone can, in theory, apply for the title. In all cases, however, becoming *odio* involves considerable expense and a man who cannot afford it will be passed over. Fees and presents of varying size must be paid to the *odio ologbo* and other *odio*, and perhaps to the *owie*. In the 1930s the fee at Usere was £6; at Ozoro it was 2s. to the *odio ologbo* and 7s. to the other *odio*, together with palm-wine, seven kolas, and four peppers for sacrifice to the departed *odio*; chalk is again rubbed on the right arm of the new *odio* by the *odio ologbo*. According to Welch the candidate is first taken to the *osewo* (priest of *oto*, the earth), who offers chalk, kola, and wine before the *ovu* sticks (ritual staffs similar to the Ibo *ofa* and Edo *axurhe*) and presents him to the spirit of the founder of the clan, chieftom, or village-group and his remembered patrilineal descendants; then to the house of the *odio ologbo*, who makes similar offerings before the *ovu* representing the spirits of past *odio*.

The senior *odio* or *odio ologbo* owes his position to "title-age," subject to his ability to pay the fees and perform the necessary ceremonies, though in one or two communities he must come from one or more specified wards. According to Welch the senior son of an *odio ologbo* takes his position for three months after his death, when the new *odio ologbo* takes over. The latter is taken before the *osewo*, who gives him a new *ovu* stick—a windfall—in the presence of the *odio* and *okpako* and two *iletu* of his quarter; this is added to those presented to previous *odio ologbo* which are passed on to him. At Erohwa, the *odio ologbo* (here called *adiome*) pays a fee to the town for his title. At Ozoro he makes gifts to the family of the late *odio ologbo* and receives presents in return.

The *odio ologbo* wears a red cap and has an iron staff, made by an Awka blacksmith, which he sticks into the ground when making sacrifices or when cursing. He must not appear in public with his head uncovered and must not share a plate or glass in eating or drinking. He receives tributes of palm-nuts or oil from each ward at the "clearing of the bush."

In his ritual role he is the priest of the collective ancestors of the community, sometimes including the founder, and he sacrifices each market day before the *ovu* sticks which he keeps on his verandah. At Owe, during the annual sacrifices to the ancestors, he sacrifices first, before each man makes offerings to his individual ancestors.

The mother (if alive) or the senior wife of the *odio ologbo* is regarded as the "mother of the clan".

The Oh3v3re Association

This is an important title-association found in the Agbarho village-group (where

²¹ From 6d. to 7s. in the 1930s.

it has definite political functions), in the tribes of the Owha group, in Olomu, and possibly in other Urhobo tribes. In all cases it is said to be of Benin origin.

Its organization appears to vary in the different communities, but in each membership is open to freeborn native men who can meet the expenses and are of good reputation. Seniority is by title-age; the headman is known as the *osivie* in Agbarho, *okareworo* in Olomu (where *osivie* is the second man); in Ughele and the other Owha tribes the *ovie* appears to be the head.

The *okhuvore* of Agbarho are divided into five companies, headed by the next five senior men to the *osivie*. These are not recruited on a geographical or kinship basis, but the *osivie* and the company heads assign candidates to them in an attempt to keep them equal. Here there is no limit or age-limit to membership, but most of the *okhuvore* are elderly. A candidate is installed, by the *osivie*, in a special house in which there is a wooden pillar (*ekpo*), decorated with a white cloth. After blowing chalk on the pillar and rubbing it on the heads of all the *okhuvore* present, the *osivie* distributes kola to them with a blessing and a share of the candidate's entrance fee. The candidate, accompanied by his mother, then kneels before him, and the *osivie* puts a handkerchief round his forehead in which he inserts a large white feather and a small red parrot's feather. After striking the candidate's head nine times with each he places a thread about the candidate's neck and a hat on his head, instructing him never to take it off except in the presence of a senior *okhuvore*.

The candidate, still kneeling, is instructed in the laws of the association, e.g., he must not collect palm-fruit or prepare mud for house-building, carry fire to the bush or water in a calabash or anything by a yoke; he must not steal or backbite and he must respect his parents.

A she-goat is sacrificed, gin is drunk, guns are fired, and the candidate is taken, with dancing, to his house where he is put ceremonially to bed. He remains secluded for seven days.

A list of expenses shows the cost of becoming an *okhuvore* in the 1930s to be £23 1s. 6d., plus three goats. The money is disbursed in gifts to the *osivie* and other *okhuvore*, to the *osivie*'s messenger and the candidate's own family, drummers and followers; and in food for the village and the purchase of feathers and a staff. The staffs (*ekpo*) are used in a quasi-judicial capacity, in the sense that when they are placed in front of a house they enforce ostracism of its occupants. Goat's blood is smeared on them at sacrifices.

A member is distinguished from the rest of the community by his dress—coral beads, a broad-brimmed hat, and silken cloths—and he gains prestige and special protection of his household and property.

At Ughele where the *okhuvore* are collectively called *isorogun* the *ovie* bestows membership after he and the townspeople have received gifts. He places a thread round the candidate's neck and the latter is handed a carved staff, which he provides himself. All the *isorogun* pile their staffs together and a sacrifice is made over them, after which they are re-distributed. There are said to be only a few members in each village.

At Olomu there are two grades of membership:—

1. *Okhuvore itete*—the entry fee is a bottle of gin and formerly 7s. in cowries paid to the *okareworo*, who puts a thread round the candidate's neck.

2. Full membership is reached in two stages. First, the candidate pays £1 15s. and a goat and the *okareworo* puts him to bed. After a fortnight's seclusion the *okareworo* takes away the bed-covering and washes him and a dance follows. Finally, a feast is provided for all the males of the group at the shrine of Ugbose, the tribe's founder; 200 yams, 24 smoked fish, and £3 10s. are produced to be shared between the full *okhuvore*.

In the 1930s there were said to be 65 *itete* and two full *okhuvore*.

The *akhekre* are the guardians of the shrine of Ugbose, the son of an *Oba* of Benin, who first created the title. Ugbose appears to be identical with Igboze, the founder of Okpe, with whom Olomu joined for a time in a single community.

The Adje or Ade Association

This is the chief title-association among the Ewu, Uwheru, and Ujevbe tribes, though it may exist in some others.

According to its legend it originated in the capture, by a joint expedition of Ewu and Uwheru people, of some water-spirits (*edjorame*)²² who wore chains of beads; their king and queen wore round their necks ivory horns which were captured by a particular family. It later became the custom for rich men to wear chains of beads like those of the water spirits and they were formed into the *adje* association.

Formerly, it is said, it was open only to the eldest sons of members who died, but it later admitted outsiders, even from other communities, on the payment of fees. In Uwheru members must come from an *aye* with no record of stealing. They are given a chain of white beads (*ato*) by the *ogbeza* (priest) and a wooden staff (*omcade*) carved with a man's head at the top. The head of the society at Ewu and Ujevbe is called *odede* and at Ewu he has a spokesman (*unneworo*). Though membership is open to members of other communities the head of the Ewu *adje* association must be an Ewu man.

At Uwheru there is an annual festival at which the four wards divide into two groups of two for a wrestling contest. It starts in the second month (*aye*) and lasts two months, during which time the members of the *ade* association perform sacrifices at the *oni eds* (mother-spirit shrine) of wrestlers, at the lake where the *ade* water-spirit or deity lives and at the shrine in the *ogbeza's* compound. It is at this time that new members are admitted.

On the night of the first full moon after the *ade* festival all brides married that year go to their husbands' houses for the first time. The Ewu and Ujevbe societies are much concerned with girls' puberty rites.²³ At Ujevbe the members receive a fee from the parents of each girl to be circumcised. They, too, fix the time for girls to join their husbands.

In Ewu the *adje* society has the particular function of installing the *ovio*. The new *ovio* must purchase the ivory horn (*ojowu*) of the queen of the water-spirits from the family who captured it; it is returned to them at the death of each *ovio*. Members of the society here must observe various ritual prohibitions; they are forbidden, for example, to climb palm trees or gather palm-fruit, to appear with their necks bare, or to engage in stealing, witchcraft, and other anti-social activities.

The *ade* society of Uwheru has important judicial functions which are described below (see p. 149).

Other Associations

Other associations of this type appear to exist in other tribes. The *onghoughware* association of the Agbon is open to all males who pay the fees and perform the necessary rites; seniority is by length of membership. Membership is a necessary preliminary to a position on the traditional village council. The *okakuru* association of the same group appears to exist primarily for the protection and advancement of its members. Membership is acquired by providing a feast for the members and a goat for sacrifice before the *ovo* sticks of the previous headmen of the society (*okakuru lode*). The insignia of a member is, again, a carved staff. The society formerly exercised quasi-judicial functions for the protection of its own rights. The title is said to be of Benin origin. The *eba* association of Ujevbe, for which the

²² Similar legends account for the origin of associations or cult groups among the Itsekiri and Ijaw. (Personal communications from P. C. Lloyd and R. Horton.)

²³ See pp. 154-6 below.

entrance fee was said to be £40 in the 1830s, now confines its activities to the service of the water-spirit (*ogba-serie*) who looks after the bearing of children. It is also responsible for the burial in the "bad bush" of murderers, people dying of loathsome diseases, or in childbirth. Women may join for a fee of about £3 10s., but are not allowed in the sacrificial house. They have their own *odede* under the *odede-obo*.

The *ogbu* or *igbu* association, which appears to be universal in Urhobo and Isoko communities is of a different nature. *Ogbu* is the title given to a man who has killed a man or, in more recent days, a leopard. In the Isoko area the skull or leopard skin is sent with gifts to the *ogbu orevigba*, the one who has killed most men or leopards.

There is an *edo* (shrine) of skulls where sacrifices are made to the spirits of departed *igbu*. There, according to Welch, the new member pretends to eat flesh from the boiled skull. The insignia of a member seems everywhere to be a red parrot feather or an "eagle" feather. At his death the skull of a member of another tribe or group should be buried with him; this is now replaced by a goat. On the burial day the members do much damage to property, trees, and livestock. At all times they probably had considerable arbitrary power and were, together with the *iletu*, a part of the warrior organization.

There are other associations of men who carry out quasi-judicial or judicial functions. These are discussed on pp. 147-9 below.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The tribe typically includes the following kinds of politico-territorial units:—

1. A supposed parent settlement divided into wards (*ogbe*) which comprise one or more extended families (*uye*) each with a patrilineal nucleus. Wards may be subdivided above the *uye* level. The parent community, which may have a population of from a few hundred to more than 5,000 people, may have, as its nucleus, a single patrilineage or patriclan, with segments forming the nuclei of the wards. More generally, however, it is made up of groups of diverse descent which may claim different tribal origins.

2. Other villages and hamlets whose inhabitants are derived almost entirely from one or more of the wards of the parent community, with which they may or may not still be affiliated, or consisting mainly of immigrants from outside the tribe.

3. Villages and hamlets derived from the above, sometimes with attached immigrants. Farming and fishing hamlets are, in some cases, merely temporary homes for members of primary or secondary parent communities and as such have little or no social or political autonomy.

Clearly this process of proliferation and absorption may continue indefinitely and, in addition, there must be some mobility between settlements at all levels.

The size and spread of the tribes vary greatly from, for example, Enhwe, a single town of two wards, one of which is divided into five sub-wards, to Ujevbe which breaks down into village groups and villages with political institutions at each level. Within the limits of settlement size given above (see p. 129) it is impossible to be more detailed about the size of settlements at any particular level, though in each tribe the parent community normally forms the largest settlement. The distance between settlements depends, to a considerable extent, on the nature of the terrain.

Determinants of Political Authority

Political authority may derive from status in one or more of the following types of groups:—

1. Kinship groups
2. Age-grades
3. Title-associations

To these must be added, in some tribes, kingship (which itself is vested in particular kinship groups) and its attendant institutions. Priesthood in important cults may also confer political authority.

Individual abilities, wealth, and following play a role in the political organization through such institutions as the *otota* and *oletu* offices, title-associations, etc. In Olomu the tribal head at any particular time appears to owe his position to individual qualities rather than to any particular institutional status.

Village and Ward Government

At the village and ward level throughout the area kinship and age appear to be the main determinants of authority, though a complete generalization is impossible. The members of the senior age-grade (*ekpako*) are usually also the senior members of their respective lineages and extended families. Village and ward councils seem to have been well established before the arrival of the British and they often have special meeting houses where the members sit in such positions as show their relative status.

In most cases the *ekpako* are the nucleus of the council and often the oldest man of the village or ward (*okpako-orere* in Olomu and Ujevbe, *okaroro* in Agbon, *okpako-ewu* in the Isoko tribes) is the headman. In some Isoko tribes he may be eclipsed in importance by the senior member of the *edio* association in village or ward, but generally, according to Welch, the *edio* sit on these councils only by virtue of their age. Among the Urhobo, however, title-association members (e.g., *akpũye* in Olomu) and priests often seem to be attached as such to the councils.

Each council has an *otota* or spokesman—a junior *okpako* in Ujevbe—who conducts its business on behalf of the headman. He is chosen for his eloquence and respect for his seniors; in larger villages he often has an assistant called *akpile* (Urhobo) or *akpoke* (some Isoko tribes) who may do most of the talking for him.

The village or ward council deals with the internal affairs of the community—the allocation of land, the closing and opening of seasons for collecting palm-fruit and fishing, supervision of the work of the *otu* and, in more recent years, the preparation of tax rolls, collection of tax, etc. Its judicial functions are discussed below.

The executive side of village and ward government is in the hands of the *oletu*, who is head of the "working" age-grades. His position seems to have been one of considerable importance and he is sometimes a member of the village council. In larger villages he may have assistant *iletu*, called *otota* and *akpile* or *akpoke*, and in some cases these seem to form an upper sub-division of the adult age-grade (*ivraiva*).

Certain minor officials, such as *ika* (messengers) and *awowo* (town-crier) are attached to each council.

TRIBAL GOVERNMENT

The pattern of authority appears to vary so much from one tribe to another, especially among the Urhobo, that it is impossible to generalize satisfactorily. A few examples will be given, therefore, of the different types of political organization that occur.

Isoko

Among the Isoko, and in the Egbreni (Urhobo) tribe the *edio* association plays a major role in the political organization. According to Welch, the *egware*²⁴ *edio* (*edio* council) is normally made up as follows:—

1. The *edio* with the *edio ologbo* as their head.

²⁴ Note the varied meanings of this word in other Edo-speaking groups. Among the Edo of the Benin kingdom and in Ishan it means "palace" or *enogie's* ward, while among the Ineme it signifies, simply, "ward".

2. The *ovie*, in certain cases, who sits on the right side of the *odis ologbo* (see above, p. 140).

3. *Iletsu*, executive officers of the council (see *age-grades*, p. 138 above).

4. *Oteta* (spokesmen) for each *odis*. In some tribes there are assistant *oteta* called *akpoko*. The *oteta* of the *odis ologbo* is the official spokesman of the council and a very influential figure within the tribe. He sits on the right hand of the *odis ologbo*. He is the repository of tribal customs, laws, and genealogies, the representative in dealings with other tribes, and he may be the virtual ruler of the tribe.

5. *Iko*²² (messengers). The chief *ako* summons council meetings on behalf of the *odis ologbo*.

6. *Osewo*, the priest of *oto*, the land, and probably the tribal founder. According to Welch the *osewo*, whose title means "father of the town," is the oldest man in the lineage of the founder's eldest son. He advises on land disputes and it is he who installs the *odis ologbo*, presenting him with the *ovu* sticks which represent the spirits of past *odis*.

7. *Ikoro*, members of the junior rank of the *odis* association who are learning their duties as *odis*.

The numbers of *odis* vary from tribe to tribe. *Usere* has nine—three from each ward. At *Aviara* they are the oldest members of the association irrespective of ward. *Uwheru* has one *odis* from each of five wards; *Olomoro* has nine from each of three wards, 27 in all.

The position of the *ovie* in certain Isoko tribes is discussed below (p. 146).

Meetings, which are irregular, are held in the *mwon egware*, an open-sided building in the market-place. The *edisi*, *oteta*, and *osewo*, and the *ovie*, where he is a member, sit on a raised platform with the *iletsu* in two rows, one on each side.

Little information is available concerning the non-judicial activities of the *egware edisi* apart from the fact that they fix the dates of tribal ceremonies.

According to Welch, the *iletsu* control the tribe in wartime and their leader, the *oteta ologbo*, issues orders without reference to the council. In peacetime, while they may have considerable influence, they carry out the orders of the *edisi*. They supervise the tasks of the age-grades, provide guards against fire and thieves, investigate disputes, try minor offences, collect fines and enforce penalties. The *oteta ologbo* is appointed by the *iletsu* themselves, but must be approved by the *edisi*, who give him a carved staff in front of which he makes offerings to the spirits of past *iletsu*.

Urhubo

In *Ujevbe* there are said to be councils at several different levels. Village or village-group councils join together to form sub-tribal councils, of which there are three, with the senior *okpako* of the sub-tribe presiding. These councils each have an *oteta*. The sub-tribal councils amalgamate in turn to form the "tribal council" which meets as occasion demands and at least once a year for sacrifices at the shrine of the founder. In practice only delegates from the councils of the smaller units attend the larger ones, usually headed by the *oteta*. The tribal head is the senior *okpako*, though occasionally an outstanding figure in the tribe might usurp his position. In *Olomu* the political organization is similar, though the sub-tribal councils are missing, but here the non-hereditary tribal head or *owhorode* was the richest and most influential man. It was he who summoned the meetings at *Otorolomu*. The council has an *oteta* and an *akpile*.

The *Ughele*, *Agbarha*, and *Ogo* tribes are much more highly centralized. In theory the *Ughele* villages have no councils and even the smallest matters, such as the closing of the palm-bush, were referred to the *ovie*. The *ovie*'s council consists of the *akpako*, *akpovire*, village *oteta*, *iletsu*, and *iko*, together with officials bearing

²² Cf. the use of the term in the palace associations at Benin and among the *Ivbiosakon*.

the Benin titles of *iyase* and *izomo*. The *iyase* is the senior half-brother of the *ovie*, who used to represent the latter while he was away at Benin obtaining his title. His appointment ceases with the death of the *ovie*. The *izomo* is a full brother of the *ovie* and, with the *iyase*, is one of the seven *oteta-ovie* appointed from the *ovie*'s family. The Ogo tribe is similarly centralized, but here the senior *okpako* (*okaruboro*) summons meetings and acts for the *ovie* in his absence. The *izomo*, chosen from a family related to the *ovie*'s, ranks second to the *ovie*. In Agbarha there are three *ovie*, one of whom is regarded as senior, and each has his council. The senior *ovie*'s court is most important and formerly dealt with questions of warfare. The *iyase* and *izomo* are appointed from among the *ovie*'s brothers, formerly after his return from Benin. The senior *okpako* or *ovire* has the important function of sacrificing for the whole community on certain occasions.

In Agbarho, an agglomeration of communities of different, though Urhobo, origins, the *okpoko* association provides a bond between the different village-groups, and its head, the *osivie*, is regarded as the ruler of Agbarho. The *okpoko* hold regular meetings every eight days at which they arrange such matters as the clearing of paths between the various village-groups.

These examples appear to be representative of most of the types of political organization found among the Urhobo tribes. There is no overall political organization among either the Urhobo or the Isoko.

The Ovie

The title *ovie* (pl. *ivie*) or "king" is found in a majority of tribes, but its importance and the status and functions of its holder vary considerably.

The title appears to be closely connected with the period of Benin domination of the area and where it is most important, the *ovie* plays a similar role to the *onogie* or *onoje* in Benin and Ishan villages and chiefdoms. Among the Isoko the titles of the *ivie* of Usere, Iyede, and of the Uruiche ward of Enhwe are said to have been obtained originally from the *Oba* of Benin. No Usere *ovie* after the first went to Benin to get his title. Each *ovie* of Elu obtained his title from the *Obi* of Aboh at a cost of £70, in return for which he received a hat, an iron *ofa* stick and a red coat. The Okpe-Isoko and Ozoro *ivie*, too, get their titles from the *Obi* of Aboh.²⁴ The title is also found in the Igboide, Emede, and Aviara tribes, where it appears to be a local imitation with no direct connection with Benin. Among the Urhobo the title is said to have been obtained from Benin by the *ivie* of Ughеле, Ogo, Agbarha, Ewu, Okparabe, Arhavbarien, Evbreni, and Ujevbe (long extinct). Those who obtained their titles from Benin were given a ceremonial sword or *aberen* (Benin *ebé*), tusks, bangles, beads, and other insignia. There are no *ivie* in the Isoko tribes Iri, Ole, Ofagbe, Emevo, Olomoro, or in the Agbarho and Olomu groups among the Urhobo.

In the case of the Isoko *ovie* titles of Benin origin, according to Welch, the skull of a deceased *ovie* was sent to Benin after three years. His eldest son then went to Benin for a period varying from 18 months to six years, taking with him slaves for the Benin chiefs.

He was taught Benin customs, language, government, religion, and his duties and powers, and finally had to choose his father's skull from a collection before the *Oba* breathed on him and gave him the title. From Benin he took two swords and a short truncheon tied with cowries with which he tapped people when condemning them to death. On his return home he had a mock battle with the priest of the land (*asewe*). A similar procedure was followed in the case of the Urhobo *ivie* of Ughеле, Ogo, and Agbarha. After his mock fight the *Ovie* of Ughеле was secluded in his house for seven days where his subjects visited him. Afterwards he was led out in

²⁴ Those tribes whose *ivie* got their titles from the *Obi* of Aboh are all in the eastern part of the area, far removed from Benin. The first *Obi*, however, is supposed to have been himself of Benin origin and disputes over the succession were taken to the *Oba* for settlement.

special robes with his arms supported Benin-fashion to make a progress through the town. The father of the present *Ovie* of Ughale and *Ivie* of Ogo and Iyede are known to have visited Benin for the confirmation of their titles during the present century, but it is not clear whether others have done so. The *Orodje* or "king" of Okpe (Orerokpe) received ceremonial swords from the *Oba* as late as the autumn of 1953.

The mode of succession to the title varies from group to group. In a majority of cases the eldest son succeeds, provided, for example in Ebu, that he can meet the necessary expenses. In a few cases, however (e.g., Usere, Ewu, Igbiide) the title can go to any member of one of a restricted number of extended families. At Usere the position is filled for a three-year interregnum after an *ovie*'s death by a man from a particular family of Ole, and at Ewu, as a mark of respect to the dead *ovie*, his son fills the position for three years before it passes to the family whose turn it is. At Iyede the succession has been very irregular and the title is disputed between two families.

The status, authority, and functions of the *ovie* vary from group to group and appear in some cases to be extremely ambiguous. In some the *ovie* is primarily a priest—this is said to be true at Igbiide and Aviara; in others, particularly where the title is of recent origin, he has few religious sanctions; elsewhere again he combines considerable spiritual and temporal powers. The strongest *ovie*, politically, appear to be those of Ughale, Ogo, Agbarha, Ewu, Okparabe, Iyede and Usere, and the *Orodje* of Orerokpe. The *ovie* of the Owba group (Ughale, Ogo, Agbarha) are said to have had absolute power over the lives of their subjects. The subjects of the *Ovie* of Ewu formerly paid him tribute in palm-oil, built and repaired his house, and brought him yams and plantain annually at the sacrifices to the ivory horn (*ojowu*).²⁷ At Igbiide, as in some of the Ishan and Benin chiefdoms, any woman could claim sanctuary by declaring herself to be the *ovie*'s wife. Here the *ovie*, who is primarily a priest, must do no manual labour other than carving; he must not enter the house of any of his subjects, drink in public or shake hands, but may claim the hind leg of any game killed. Only a light-skinned man may become *ovie*.

The position of the *Ovie* of Usere appears to be very ambiguous. He is primarily the priest of the Eni Lake spirit (see p. 163) which, on account of the reputation of that spirit for detecting witches, gives him considerable wealth and reputation. Thus he has much temporal power and by other groups is considered as the "king" of Usere. Within Usere, however, he sits, eats, and drinks after the *adi* *ologbo*. This is true also of certain other Isoko *ovie*; in Aviara, for instance, the *ovie* is not even a member of the group council. At Enhwe, where Uruike, one of the wards, has an *ovie*, he is of equal status with the *adi* *ologbo* of the other ward.

LAW AND ORDER

The traditional institutions and procedures for the maintenance of law and order have largely been superseded by the native, magistrates', and supreme courts, although some of the old institutions and sanctions may still function in certain contexts.

Ward, village, and tribal councils, title-associations and age-grades all had judicial or quasi-judicial functions in certain situations. Disputes between individuals or groups, if not settled by arbitration and agreement between their respective families, would come before the council of the lowest unit to which both parties belonged. Failure to settle at this level might cause the dispute to be brought before the tribal council. Murder, serious robbery and violence, and other crimes regarded as being offensive to the whole community, came before the tribal council in the first instance. Above the tribal level there appears to have

²⁷ See section on the *Ade* Society (p. 142).

been no machinery for the punishment of offences or the settlement of disputes apart from arbitration or feud, followed by an agreement sworn upon some deity or fetish.

Penalties²²

Murder was tried by the tribal council and punished by hanging. The tribal head usually touched the murderer on the head with an *axurhe* (carved staff) before the *iletu* or *iko* carried out the hanging, though in some tribes the murderer was forced to hang himself or, if he refused, his family had to do it. Parricides, matricides, and wife-killers were subject to the death penalty in Olomu, but in Ewu a parricide would be driven out and a man who killed his mother could remain in his father's compound though he would bring shame on the whole community. If a man killed his own child in Ewu and Olomu he had to pay compensation to the family of the child's mother. A man could kill his own slaves, but if he killed another man's slave he would have to replace him (see *Slavery*, p. 150, below). Killing in a fight was regarded as murder. Involuntary killing required compensation by the transfer of a person to the deceased's family and, among the Isoko, by paying the cost of burial.

Assaults were dealt with among the Isoko by the ward, village, or tribal council, according to the relationship of the two parties, and punished by a fine and compensation or by giving permission to the innocent party to damage the livestock, produce, and property of the offender.

Stealing, burglary, and robbery were dealt with by the ward, village, or tribal council, according to the seriousness of the offence. Fines and compensation, flogging and, in the case of persistent offenders, blinding or selling into slavery were the usual penalties. In some cases there were fixed fines which varied according to the kind of property involved. In Emevo a man might be put to death or sold into slavery for stealing farm produce. In some tribes judicial powers were delegated to title-associations for the settlement of cases of theft. These are dealt with below.

Defamation by, for instance, calling a free man a slave was a serious injury requiring heavy compensation.

Adultery was settled by the council of the lowest unit to which both the husband and the lover belonged. The lover normally had to pay a fine and compensation to the injured husband and to provide him with materials for the necessary sacrifice to the ancestors, purification of the house and the woman, etc. Failure to compensate might result in the husband's family seizing or destroying the lover's or his family's property, or even property belonging to other persons in the town, who would then hold the offender responsible.

The rape of an unmarried girl was normally punished by a fine and compensation to the girl's father, but in some tribes it is said not to be a serious offence if the girl is past the age of puberty. In the case of a married woman there was normally no distinction between rape and adultery, though in others an extra fine might be imposed.

Divorce among the Isoko, according to Welch, could only be effected by the *egware edis*, who alone could annul a marriage and compel the return of the marriage-payment. Presents made during the betrothal period (but not circumcision costs) would be repaid, but some might be deducted for each child born.

Land disputes were normally settled by oaths or ordeals, the loser paying expenses.

Procedure

The normal procedure appears to have been for the party or parties to be brought before the council by the *iko*, where they stated their case and witnesses were heard. This was done in public, where public opinion could be gauged. Among

²² See also Thomas, 1910 (I), pt. I, pp. 103 ff., for details of penalties.

the Isoko, the *ediz*, *oviz*, and *osewo* then withdrew to discuss the matter and the *otota*, on behalf of the *ediz ologbo*, announced their decision.

Oaths and Ordeals

These appear to have been used frequently. The plaintiff and defendant in a dispute would have to agree on the deity or object on which the oath should be sworn. Ordeals were used where there was doubt over a serious issue and were undergone by the party whose testimony was doubted or by both parties. The following were among those most frequently employed: (1) A needle or feather pushed through the ear or tongue after being rubbed with medicine. If it could be withdrawn easily the party was not guilty (*Olomu*). (2) Picking cowries out of boiling water with the hand after rubbing it with medicine; to escape without burns proved innocence (*Olomu*). (3) Picking an axe-head out of a roaring fire and walking about 25 yds. with it. If the party was not burned he was innocent. (4) The *saiswood* ordeal was used to determine the guilt of witches, but the *Eni Lake* ordeal was most usual for this purpose.²⁹

Enforcement of Judgments

The *ikz*, messengers of the *ediz*, and more especially the *iletu*, heads of the working age-grades, were normally the executive officers of the councils, making arrests, inflicting punishments, collecting fines, and seizing property if these were not paid. For these services they kept a portion of the fines, the rest going to the members of the council, with possibly a share to the injured party. In *Ughele* a large proportion of the fines was taken by the *oviz*.

Delegation of Judicial Powers.

The *iletu*, who investigated cases before they were brought before a council, often settled minor affairs, such as petty theft or assault, on their own account, inflicting beatings or levying small fines. They had the power to settle disputes between members of their own *otu*, to inflict punishments for failure to take part in communal tasks, etc. In some tribes there appears to have been a more definite delegation of powers to title-associations. In *Uwheru*, the *Ade* association was especially concerned with theft. Theft stained a family for many generations; a member of the *Ade* association must be from a family free from all suggestion of a stealing record, and a member of the society who could be proved to have stolen was dismissed. All the title-associations had their own laws and applied penalties to their members. In some cases, too, the members appear to have had special rights and to have exercised quasi-judicial functions for their own protection and advancement. Thus a man might be fined money and a sheep for wrongfully charging a member of the *Ade* association of *Uwheru* of not being worthy of his title. If, in a quarrel, a man broke the carved staff of an *Ade* man, he would be forced to pay a fine and, if he refused, all the members planted their sticks outside his compound while the priest cursed the man and his family. The *okakuru* association among the *Agbon* appears to have acted in the same way. If its members or their wives were assaulted or offended they would levy a fine and, if this was not paid, they might sell the offender into slavery.

SLAVERY

Slavery was a recognized institution throughout the *Urhobo-Isoko* area. A man or woman might become a slave (*oviz*) in one of three ways:—

1. By capture in war.
2. By sale, as a punishment for serious or frequent crimes. A debtor whose family refused to help him might be sold into slavery. At *Agbarho* it is reported

²⁹ See p. 163, and cf. Hubbard, *op. cit.*, pp. vi, 103-5 and 219 ff.

that a "strong" man might seize a weaker man who stole from him, or committed adultery with his wife or trespassed on his land, etc., and sell him into slavery. In some tribes it is said that a father might sell one of his own sons into slavery. A person did not normally become a slave in his own tribe.

3. By birth, i.e., the children of two slaves were themselves slaves.

Both men and women could own slaves and pass them on to their heirs; a man's slaves would be inherited and shared in the same manner as his widows. In exchange for his labour a slave received a home, some land to work, food, and a wife. Welch says that among the Isoko a slave worked for his master on two full days in a four-day week. The rest of the time he could work for himself, but he was not allowed to sell the produce. On the other hand it is said that in Olomu a senior slave who won his master's confidence would be allowed to work for his own advantage and some slaves became very wealthy. Emancipation was possible in the tribe, at the master's whim; the slave gave up all his possessions, he was washed and his head shaved and he became free.

A man could flog his slave and even put him to death, but a very troublesome slave would be sold, or used as a sacrifice. Slaves were sacrificed before certain shrines, e.g., that of *Oyibo*, the "war deity" at Owe, and in the making of peace treaties between two communities. Normally slaves obtained by capture would be used for sacrifice or sale to slave-traders as they would be more likely to run away. The Urhobo do not seem to have been directly concerned with the European slave-trade; for this the Itsekiri acted as middle-men.

Generally the children of slaves (*ibudo*) remained slaves except when a free-born man married his own or his father's or another man's slave; in the last case he may pay the marriage-payment to the owner of the slave and in all cases the issue of the marriage would be free. Otherwise the children of a female slave belonged to her master, whoever might be the father, though in Olomu a free father is said to have been able to redeem by a money payment his children born of a liaison with another man's slave. There was no penalty for such a liaison or for adultery between slaves. A freeborn woman could not marry a slave. Welch says that a slave would be put to death for adultery with a free man's wife, other reports state that there was no penalty.

The stigma of slave descent appears to have persisted for some time after the abolition of slavery in 1914. Welch found men remaining who were not allowed to worship the tribal founder and were thus denied the latter's supernatural protection. They were not regarded as freed men until they had paid redemption money to their masters, and this amounted to £25-£40 among the Agbon. In Owe, until this was paid, they could not become members of the *adi* society and were therefore debarred from all positions of honour and influence. It was difficult, too, to marry a freeborn woman until redemption had been secured.

In recent years it was said that there were no persons of slave descent left unredeemed; the stigma appears to have gone.

LAND TENURE^{22a}

Rights in farming land are more complex than in other branches of the Edo-speaking peoples. In different communities and in various contexts rights over tracts of land are said to be vested in the chiefdom or village-group, village, ward, extended family or lineage, and the individual. Theoretically the land of a tribe belongs to the tribe as a whole and the tribal headman or elders may exercise residual rights over it. Thus in Ugehe, where land is plentiful a man who requires more land for cultivation may apply to the *Ovie*, and any land acquired in this way is retained until death when it reverts to the community. In most cases, however, tribal rights appear to be exercised only in opposition to attempts by individuals or groups within the community to alienate their land.

^{22a} See also Thomas "Report," pt. I, pp. 83 ff.

According to Hubbard,³⁰ "ownership" of land is generally vested in "families" and lineages. Lineages which have rights in land are of varying depth and range, and may be the nuclei of extended families, wards, villages, or wider groups.

Welch distinguished three types of land tenure among the Isoko:—

1. In Usere, where the whole community is traditionally descended from one ancestor through his three sons, all the land is controlled by the *Ovie*, who allots farmland afresh to each ward annually. Ward elders allot tracts to sub-wards whose headmen, in turn, allot it to family groups.

2. In Iyede, where the community is traditionally descended from four brothers, the land is permanently divided between the four wards within which tracts are re-allotted annually by the senior man in each ward.

3. In Ozoro exclusive rights are invested permanently in "family" groups. The family head has the right to pledge it without permission from a higher authority. Ozoro land is very densely populated.

These examples probably account for most of the varieties of land tenure in the area. In the Agbon group of villages, however, farmland is said to be individually "owned." Each man has from five to seven plots which he farms in rotation; on his death they are inherited by his sons. Rights of alienation are, however, limited. In some other areas virgin bush reclaimed by an individual or family becomes individual or family property, though they may not be allowed to alienate it to strangers.

Boundaries between major land-holdings are marked by trees, ponds, ant-hills, etc.

Generally speaking no individual, lineage, family, or other land-holding group may sell land outright, though there appear to be exceptions to this rule among the Agbon-Owe-Elu communities where individually-owned land may be sold to individuals of the same group and in Usere the land of a serious criminal could formerly be sold by the community.³¹ Land can be loaned rent-free, but the borrower has no security and no rights except in crops which he has already planted. In some groups land may be leased, but usually only by senior members of the land-holding unit; "families" can rent out their land at Agbarbo.

In most areas land can be pledged against a loan or to pay off a debt and the pledgee's rights pass to his heirs. The land must be returned if and immediately the loan or debt is liquidated, and in all cases the permission of the head of the land-holding unit is necessary. In some of the Agbon villages pledging is forbidden.

In a few cases villages of one tribe live on land belonging to other tribes to which they pay rent.

Strangers who settle permanently in a community are gradually admitted to full land rights.

There is, according to the available information, no individual ownership of palm-trees except in so far as a man may be allowed to own one or two trees near his "oil-canoe", though in some cases certain trees are regarded as belonging to the *Ovie*. Palms are generally owned collectively by villages, wards, or descent groups and any member of the owning group may collect palm-fruits from any tree in its tract of palm-bush. The tendency for the palm-bush to be divided up into "family" holdings is said to have increased during the present century.

In most areas there are open and close seasons for the collection of palm-produce. In the Ugehe chieftdom areas of bush may be closed for a period for the benefit of a chief, a poor man, or a man who is shortly to bear the expenses of his bride's puberty rites.

Strangers may be given permission to collect palm-fruit against the payment of an annual rent.

³⁰ Op. cit., pp. 39-40.

³¹ It seems unlikely that it would be alienated to an outsider.

INHERITANCE²²

When an adult man dies his eldest son (or his senior surviving brother if the son is a minor) takes over his privileges and responsibilities. He takes control of the land, wives, and property of the deceased and becomes responsible for his debts.

Three months after the death the head of the extended family shares out the property. The eldest son receives the compound, wives (except his own mother), and the best part of the land. The standing crops are shared between sons and brothers, personal effects between sons and daughters. The wives retain only their cooking utensils. The mother of the eldest son goes to a brother of the deceased, who must kill a goat to secure the permission of the dead husband. The new husband becomes responsible for the care of her unmarried children and receives the marriage-payment on daughters subsequently married. A widow who wishes to marry someone else must return the marriage-payment to her proper inheritor.

THE LIFE CYCLE

BIRTH²³

Children are for the Isoko the greatest of blessings for they bring prestige and status to their parents in this world and peace and security after death. Sons are most valued as ensuring the continuity and expansion of the extended family and lineage. Girls give proof that the mother is not barren and at a later date the parents benefit from the marriage-payment.

Deceased ancestors are believed to be reincarnated in infants of the same sex. If the father dies during the mother's pregnancy and a son is born he will be regarded as his father's reincarnation. If a woman loses a child in infancy and then bears another child of the same sex the second is regarded as the former returned.

If a woman fails to conceive during the first few months of marriage a diviner may advise sacrifices at a fertility shrine, to the clan founder's spirit, or to the ancestors of her husband or of her own family.

Sexual intercourse should stop in the sixth month of pregnancy and earlier if the father has more than one wife. The husband may send his wife to her own parents' home to deliver the child and he must provide her with suitable medicines at certain stages of the pregnancy. Pregnancy is an honourable state for the woman and every precaution is taken to ensure its successful outcome. Taboos may be advised by the diviner and the woman may have to keep them not only during this period but for the rest of her life. For fear of witchcraft the husband will never mention his wife's pregnancy and she herself will speak of it only with her mother and sisters. Any other person referring to it risks being accused of witchcraft and quarrelling with a pregnant woman is sharply condemned.

As the time for delivery draws near the woman must reveal before the shrine of her husband's lineage ancestors the names of any men who have had sexual intercourse with her since her betrothal or who have called her "my wife" or stepped over her feet. The husband and the men of his *we* may then kill livestock or cut down plantains in the offender's quarter and the latter will be held responsible. Failure to confess on the woman's part is believed to cause difficult pregnancies and labour.

Birth usually takes place on the back verandah of the house and no man or boy is allowed near. The girl's mother and sisters and other relatives invited on account of their experience will be present and, if necessary, a special midwife (*orherke* in Urhobo)—who also performs clitoridectomy—may be called in for a small fee. Parturition takes place with the woman sitting on the ground and leaning against some object. The child is left unattended until the birth of the placenta, when the cord is cut 4 ins. from the body. The baby is then washed and rubbed

²² See Thomas, 1910 (1), pt. I, pp. 85-9.

²³ See also Thomas, 1922, pp. 250 ff.

with white "chalk". The water is buried on one side of the hearth and the placenta on the other where witches may not get at them. The umbilical cord is allowed to shrivel and is then thrown into a pond or buried at the foot of a plantain tree, according to whether the father wishes his child to be a good fisherman or a good farmer.

After seven days offerings are made to the floor of the house, the ancestor spirits, the *oyise*, and the evil spirits. Three months later the mother rubs herself and the child with camwood dye and, clad in her best clothes and ornaments, goes to the farm, scattering chalk at each path junction for the spirits that dwell there for the protection of the child. At the farm she pulls a few weeds, cuts a few small pieces of firewood, and returns home to resume her normal life.

The child is named on the eighth day of its life when it is anointed with oil by the eldest male of the father's *aye*. Various people may give the child a name, but the one chosen by the mother usually becomes the one by which the child is normally known.

A woman who gives birth without mishap is given presents and honoured with the name *oyewo*.

Death during childbirth or pregnancy is a great calamity (*ete*) for the whole community. The woman is thrown into the "bad bush", as are victims of suicide and smallpox. Large sacrifices must be made to the ancestors and before fertility shrines, and the whole town (and, if the woman was a trader, the market-place) is purified by driving out evil spirits. At Ole this is done with flaming torches and whips which are afterwards flung into the "bad bush". The woman's property passes to the "children of the bad bush"—a special company of men who perform the burials there.

Twins are regarded as the work of evil spirits or witches. In the inland Isoko villages the second twin was formerly put into a pitcher with ashes and fire and thrown into the bush, while among the "fishing" Isoko both were usually drowned. Sacrifices to the usual spirits and deities followed. Dumb and blind children are regarded as punishments to the mother, while cripples are often destroyed at birth. Albinism apparently carries no stigma, but a child which cuts its upper teeth first may be sold to another tribe.

INFANCY

The mother normally nurses her baby for about three years though by the end of this period the child has been eating solid foods for some time. During the lactation period the child rarely leaves its mother and is fed whenever it cries. Until the child is weaned the mother should not conceive again, but Christian monogamy and the introduction of tinned milk are said by Welch to have begun to alter this custom. Weaning is a casual process and after it the child is often sent to live with its maternal grandmother for as much as three years.

The mother's sister rather than the father's sister takes care of an orphaned child and a foster-mother will usually be sought in the mother's father's *aye* rather than in that of the child's own father.

Infant mortality is high and all deaths except, perhaps, those of very old people, are regarded as being due to witches who are enemies of the family or who are employed by such enemies.

BOYHOOD

A boy is normally circumcised at the age of three to seven years by the *oyanese* (circumciser of boys). No ceremonial attaches to the operation, but the foreskin is buried with the head of a fish said to resemble it.

Boys form play groups, *ogbe-eye*, with an age-range of about three years and for a while they may play with girls of the same age. At about the age of six, a boy begins to follow his father to the bush to hunt or farm and a year later he will begin

to wear his first cloth. By this time he is able to apply the correct kinship terms to members of his mother's and father's *ekwe* and *uwe*.

A boy, unlike his sister, is allowed to eat with his father, who will teach him farming and hunting techniques, nature-lore, the geography of the land, and the principles of land tenure and his ritual duties. Unlike the girls he is allowed to sit in the village rest-house in the evenings and listen to the conversation of the old men.

His playthings are bows and arrows, matchets, fishing-tackle, etc., and he learns their correct use through the praise and ridicule of his elders.

No ceremonies are performed when a boy reaches puberty.

GIRLHOOD

A girl belongs to no fixed play-group. Her duties begin earlier and by the time she is 11 she will be able to prepare meals, carry firewood, draw water, and look after her younger brothers and sisters, and she will know something of trading and farming. She will know to which men she may look for sexual pleasures, and all her thoughts will be directed towards her coming clitoridectomy and marriage.

By the time the girl begins to menstruate she already knows the taboos attending that event. She knows that she must sleep in the *uwon ogho* (menstruation house) during her menses and that she must not enter her own or other houses; nor should she cook or touch any fire, cooking pot or water pot; if she does so the pot will never be used again. Nor must she eat with others, touch a man, farm, or enter any shrine. Her first menses should be reported to her future husband if she is betrothed so that he may prepare to play his part in her puberty ceremonies.

According to Welch sexual intercourse begins at a very early age, and there is licence on all occasions of feasting and dancing. Copulation in the bush is forbidden, however, and the lover usually obtains the use of a room from the girl's mother for a small gift. After the girl is betrothed she must keep her love-affairs very secret; if she should conceive by another man her future husband may claim damages.

Except possibly for the death of a very important man "no other event", according to Welch, "entails the spending of so much money, time, preparation, and emotion" as female circumcision (*oyao*). It is, he says, possibly the only rite not weakened by European influence. Any woman who dares to give birth to a child before her labia minora (*ubieko*) have been removed defiles herself, her ancestors, and those of her husband or betrothed, and the tribe; she risks banishment. Sacrifices must be made at all the principle shrines.

The Isoko regard circumcision as changing a girl into a woman. Once the operation has been performed no man other than her husband should step over her legs or mention sexual intercourse to her. She is for a time the centre of admiration and envy and the recipient of many gifts. If the girl is betrothed her future husband pays most of the expenses (see below, p. 157).

After the girl has had her first menses and reaches an age at which she can carry out farming and household duties, the suitor asks her parents' permission to arrange for her circumcision. At the third request they agree and a date is fixed, perhaps a year later. The arrangement is sealed by the elders of the girl's father's *uwe* and her mother's and father's sisters drinking palm-wine together, and by the suitor sending wine to four senior men of the father's *uwe* and three senior women of the mother's family.

The girl is aware of the fact that the time of her circumcision rites is drawing near, but she is not told the actual date. The operation is performed in her father's compound by the *oyamete*, the circumciser of girls, assisted usually by the girl's brother and four strong women free from suspicion of witchcraft. Before the labia minora are removed the *oyamete* touches the girl's belly with *ibw* (grated yam mixed with palm-oil) and puts the rest outside to satisfy the evil spirits (*ihimuomu*).

The labia minora are buried with the head of a fish in a hole in the compound. While this is taking place the girl's former companions, hearing her scream, may fight to get into the compound as a gesture of objection to her departure from their group. The *oyamefe* receives a fee of 2s. and is fed, and unless she is a relative or from the same quarter her part in the rites is now at an end.

The girl is now placed on a chair on the verandah of the house with a plate by her side into which visitors are expected to place gifts. The amount she will get depends on her popularity and prestige. Her father fires a gun to call on her friends to come and rejoice and the husband comes and fires a gun and goes away. Then the women of the quarter dance in honour of the girl's mother and she gives them salt or money with which to buy it, while her helpers cook a large feast for these and other kinsfolk of the parents who dance and sing the praises of the girl.

The bridegroom, with his relatives and friends, marches to the girl's compound, bringing the materials for constructing her special circumcision bed. He puts a present in the plate beside the girl—say £3 if he is pleased with her—and his followers make gifts according to their means and their regard for her. This can be a time of great prestige or of great shame for the girl. A wealthy suitor may even engage special dancers to honour his betrothed.

The future husband's party, in order of seniority, are given portions of a particular fish and then, in the special house provided by the girl's parents, they build a bed of wood and bamboo, high off the ground, on which the girl will sleep; the normal adult sleeps on a low mud bed or on mats on the floor, though the fashion is now changing in favour of wooden beds. The party is then feasted by the girl's parents, who usually kill a pig or a goat, and they then depart, praising the couple and their generosity. The girl's friends, to whom her betrothed has given presents, dance while she is led to the bed by her eight attendants.

For three months the girl is in great ritual danger. She does no manual work, eats special foods, sleeps only on the special bed in the circumcision house, and takes great ritual precautions. During this period she is attended by girls younger than herself, two of whom—the *ikova*—are provided by the future husband. In some tribes all the attendants stay with the girl for the whole period, but usually six of them depart after nine days, leaving only the *ikova* to stay on to the end. The betrothed may also provide two small boys for carrying water—the only occasion on which males are known to do this.

The chief occupation of the little girls is to prepare the camwood dye with which the circumcised girl is rubbed twice daily, from head to foot, after the wound has healed. Her clothes and her attendants and younger brothers and sisters, the future husband and his friends, and any woman from the ward who has recently borne a child may come to be rubbed too and it is the girl's mother's task to ensure that there is always a supply of the dye available. Once or twice, on fixed days which vary from tribe to tribe, the little attendants rub on dye and go to the market where the quality of it is publicly judged and criticised by the traders. Presents of food-stuffs are made to the attendants by the families of the girl and her betrothed and by others who care to give them, and these they take back and share with the girl. Among the riverside Isoko tribes the girl herself appears under a dyed cloth and dances on the ninth day. The prestige of the girl's mother is at stake on these occasions because she is responsible for the quality of the dye; that of the girl's future mother-in-law too, to some extent, for it is she who purifies the camwood in case it has been in contact with witches or with a girl who has had sexual intercourse with her son.

MARRIAGE²⁴

Marriage is, as has been shown, closely bound up with the circumcision of the bride, but it begins much earlier and it is not completed even when the girl goes to

²⁴ See also Thomas, 1910 (1), pt. I, pp. 68 ff.

her husband's house at the end of her circumcision period. Welch says of Isoko marriage that it is a cumulative process beginning at betrothal, continued and strengthened by the use of special names between the two families concerned and through the giving and receiving of gifts, and involving the circumcision of the bride, the reception of the bride into her husband's house, her aggregation to his *uye* and separation from her own family, and the birth of children. Betrothal (*esakofu*) may be arranged by the parents of the partners when one or both are still in the womb or in their infancy or at any subsequent period. Objections from either partner may now cause the marriage to be annulled and the marriage-payment returned, but if the girl is difficult the suitor may give a present known as *ugbo ogba* ('strong foot') to her father or brother so that he may attempt to force her to go through with it. At the present day boys and girls often choose their own partners, the opportunities for doing so having been increased by the ability of young men to earn the amount of the marriage-payment by selling palm-oil.³⁶ If a young man chooses his own wife he will see her privately for some time before visiting the compound and at this time her parents will make enquiries about his character, the fertility of his family, his wealth, and whether he worships the same ancestor spirits.

Eventually the suitor will send messengers (*onyiko*), usually his elder brothers, to ask the girl's father for permission to marry her. On the first two occasions the father will refuse, but on the third, when presented with gin and palm-wine, he will give his answer in the presence of his wife and possibly his or her sister. If he agrees the amount of the *enu aye* (marriage-payment) is fixed and the contract is sealed by the drinking of palm-wine (*udiarowaye*—the palm-wine at the marriage of a wife). All present must drink and the contract is thus made binding. From this time onward the girl should conduct herself as the wife of her betrothed and if she continues to have love-affairs must be very discreet about them.

At this time or a little later part of the *enu aye*, say one-third, will have been paid. The amount agreed upon is already well-known by both families and by outsiders, and the whole can be reclaimed in the case of a divorce. Of the total the girl's father should give one-fifth to her mother, which she shares with her family. The bride herself gets a small share in presents or cash and the rest is shared by the father with his brothers. The division of the marriage-payment ensures the assistance of both the father's and the mother's families should it later have to be returned. The marriage-payment of the daughter of an unmarried mother whose father has not recognized the child and paid compensation for her goes to the mother herself. This is the position among the Isoko.

We have little information about the size of marriage-payments among either the Urhobo or the Isoko. At Okpe-Urhobo it is said that in the old days the amount of marriage-payment could be reduced according to the amount of service which the son-in-law gave his father-in-law in farming. A willing helper would pay perhaps 15 bags of cowries and an unwilling one 20 bags. In the 1930s at Okpe the payment was about £15 and this was divided in much the same fashion as among the Isoko. At Ughale, on the other hand, it was between £20 and £30.

After betrothal the Isoko male partner should use the following terms of address in respect of his affines:—

Ogo: The girl's father and his brothers and her mother's brothers and the girl's brothers and their sons who may be older than himself.

Oni aye (=wife's mother): The girl's mother and her sisters, the girl's father's sisters and their daughters older than himself.

Birth name: The girl herself.

³⁶ Welch points out that the amount of the marriage-payment was affected by the prevailing prices paid for palm-oil. Between 1932 and 1934 the *enu aye* fell from around £40 to £7-£15 while a cask of palm-oil fell from £40 to £3.

The betrothed Isoko girl, in return, uses the following forms of address:—

- | | |
|---|--|
| <i>Ose orowo me</i> (my father
by marriage): | } Her betrothed's father and brothers. |
| <i>Oni orowo me</i> (my mother
by marriage): | |
| <i>Ozare me</i> (my husband): | } She may use this of her husband when speaking to her father or mother. She must not use his personal name. |
| | |

The male partner must not eat in the presence of his betrothed or her family. The girl must hide herself from senior members of the future husband's family. She will send messages to him through her younger brothers and sisters. She may speak, work, and have full sexual relations with him should she desire it, but on no account must she eat or worship with him.

The suitor is expected to present the girl's family with food and palm-oil and to help them in farming, fishing, and house-building. In addition he must dig the grave of the girl's father or mother should either of them die. Among the Urhobo of Ughelu he is said to be responsible for all the funeral expenses. To the girl herself he should give cloths and ornaments each year, the amount depending on his wealth and her conduct. These or their value are returnable in the case of divorce. The suitor should try to complete the marriage-payment before the girl is circumcised. He is responsible, too, for the greater part of the expenses of circumcision and a poor, cheap circumcision will be a disgrace both to himself and to the girl's parents. Lavish reciprocal hospitality is expected between the two families.

After the completion of the circumcision rites as described above, the girl goes to join her husband at his house, though this may be delayed if not enough of the marriage-payment has been handed over. In some tribes, however, all girls go to their husbands on a day chosen by the tribal elders. The bride arrives at her husband's house by night accompanied by four people from her father's family and three from her mother's, who sing her praises. The father and mother themselves remain behind. To please her own family the bride must feign sadness. At Ughelu she carries a broom with which she sweeps her husband's house on arrival and during the next seven days. There the husband leaves the house free that night for the bride and her party. The following morning the couple stand inside the threshold of the husband's house, facing the doorway and each with a foot on the step. They clasp each other by the neck and rest their big toes on the step in the blood of a he-goat supplied and slaughtered by the bridegroom's family, while prayers are made for them.

Among the Isoko, on the arrival of the bridal party, the husband feasts them and the members of his own extended family in the following order:—First the males of the bride's party, then the males of the husband's *aye*, then the bride's women followers and, finally, the women of the groom's family, preserving the order of seniority within each group. The last portion of kola and wine, called *awo wore* (washing the feet) goes to the senior man of the bride's party, as her father's representative. The elders of the husband's village and most members of his quarter are feasted and an animal is killed; the foot is sent to the girl's parents to indicate the size. Finally, the groom gives a present of money to the bride's party, who return home to offer sacrifices to the ancestor spirits of her *aye* with the request that she may bear many healthy children. The bridegroom's father, in turn, offers sacrifices to his ancestors for a blessing on the marriage.

The bride sleeps with her husband that night and the succeeding ones and eats with his mother. On the seventh day she visits her husband's ancestor shrine with kola and wine and is asked to make a full confession of her sexual relations with other men since her betrothal, giving the names of those who have had sexual intercourse with her or spoken of it to her, or stepped over her feet. The husband can

claim damages from all these and from the proceeds he should make sacrifices to his ancestors. The wife prays to the ancestors, asking them to accept her into the *uye* and to make her fertile. From this time onwards she belongs to her husband's *uye* until the time of her death when her own family can reclaim her body to bury it. She may still, however, participate in the worship of her mother's female ancestors (*inemo*) and those of her father's *uye* (*esemo*).

Thomas describes a series of visits which the bride pays to her parents during the first year of marriage, staying for fixed periods of days and taking, each time, presents from her husband to her parents.³⁶

For at least three months the new wife lives, works, and eats with her husband's mother and is taught her duties. The husband still eats food cooked by his mother if he has no other wife. Finally, the girl obtains her own house in the husband's family's compound or quarter; she begins to cook for him and her own family send her the necessary domestic utensils, which remain her property. This stage is called *owon okerie*, and, according to Welch, it completes the marriage. From now on the couple may eat together if there are no visitors or children present.

The wife may be sent back to her parents for the birth of a child. At Iyede³⁷ when a wife conceives for the first time she goes to stay with her mother for three days. She then returns to her husband, but four or five months later goes back to her mother and remains with her till the child is three months old. The husband then takes a calabash of oil and sees his child for the first time. He presents the oil, together with some fish, to the girl's parents and is then free to take her home.

Apart from this normal process of marriage there are, according to Welch, a number of other ways in which a wife may be obtained among the Isoko:—

(1) *Aye uku*—wife by inheritance. A widow can be inherited by her husband's brother in virtue of the marriage-payment made for her by the deceased. No fresh payment is made, but the woman should be presented with a gift by her new husband. A sheep (*ewc osaye*—sheep of the father's wife) is killed as compensation to the deceased whose spirit might otherwise kill any children she may bear for her new husband.

(2) *Aye udi*—A man may choose to marry the daughter of a thief caught stealing his property, rather than prosecute him. In this case no marriage-payment is made.

(3) *Aye ewone*—wife in exchange. A man may sometimes exchange his betrothed for a less troublesome and more obedient sister.

DEATH AND MORTUARY RITES³⁸

Among the Isoko, according to Welch, death occurs when the life force (*zsi*) leaves the body. Except when a very old person dies death is always attributed to witchcraft or to punishment by supernatural entities for some wrong done.

On the death of an adult man his wives and other women of his household wail round the corpse, then dance and sing songs expressing their sorrow and praising the virtues of the deceased. The corpse is then washed with soap and water (and with gin if he was a wealthy or prominent man), dressed in fine clothes and ornaments and placed in a chair. A goat is killed and the blood is rubbed on the corpse. Offerings are made to the ancestors (*esemo*) and the remainder cooked and eaten. The senior son provides a new cloth in which to wrap the body.

The interment of a man of ordinary status takes place within 36 hours, but the corpse of an *owu* or *adi ologbo* is kept for seven days, having been dried by draining over a chalk pit. For interment the body may be placed in a canoe with a fitted lid, or a wooden coffin, or simply wrapped in bamboo, or palm-leaf mats.

³⁶ Thomas, 1910 (1), pt. I, p. 60.

³⁷ Thomas, loc. cit.

³⁸ For further details see Thomas, 1920 (2).

Cowrie shells, food, palm-wine, and extra clothes are placed with the body and, formerly, a slave would be killed for burial with an *ovise* or *odis ologbo*.

The grave (*ogbe*) is dug in the deceased's compound by his sons-in-law, if any. The actual interment is followed by *ugie pia* "the dance of matchets", in which the dancers wave matchets about and cut down any plantains or livestock they see. A feast follows for members of the extended family.

On the seventh day plantain leaves which have covered the grave are thrown away and non-members of the *nye* may enter the compound for the first time without being defiled. On the eighth day the deceased's sleeping mats are burned. Mourning continues for three months during which time daughters of the deceased remain in their father's compound. His sisters and classificatory sisters may go back to their husbands after the seventh day.

A "second burial" takes place if the extended family cannot afford to perform the full rites immediately after the death or if a diviner holds it to be necessary in order that the deceased's spirit may enter *crini*, the spirit world. If a man dies while his senior son is still a minor the latter will perform the full rites when he is grown up. A coffin is made of bamboo to resemble a canoe, while a piece of the trunk of a plantain tree represents the deceased. Sticks are inserted into the trunk to represent hands and feet and it is dressed in clothes and a hat. This figure is placed upright in a chair, while the mourners pay homage to the deceased with singing and dancing. Then it is buried in the coffin in the grave where the real body was interred. Feasting, dancing, and singing follow, and the eldest son of the deceased distributes sums of money to those present, especially the elders.

A woman's corpse is claimed by her own lineage. Her husband may not bury her, for if he did so he would be treating her as a slave. An infant is buried anywhere, an older child in the compound, but without ceremony. If a betrothed girl dies, her parents must return part of her marriage-payment or provide another daughter to replace her.

RELIGION AND MAGIC³⁹

THE HIGH GOD

The Isoko and Urhobo worship a high god, *Oghene*,⁴⁰ who is the creator of the world and of life and death. *Oghene* is said to be indescribable, but to be in some way connected with the sky, and he is sometimes believed to be located at the junction of the earth and sky; the elements are regarded as expressions of his moods. By nature *Oghene* is good and kind, though he punishes evil, even by death. In Isoko country, according to Welch, there are no sacrifices to him and no shrines, though prayers of a submissive nature are addressed to him as *ose mare* (our father).⁴¹

Sacrifices are made to god's messenger, *uké oghene* on platforms built round an *oyise* sapling in each compound. There are two platforms and on the upper one the compound head places his chewing stick each morning, offering prayers for health, wealth, children, peace in the town, etc. Each ward has its communal *oyise*, which is served by the *okpaks* on each rest day and on special occasions when the members of the ward unite for some purpose.

Among the Urhobo *Oghene* is represented in each compound by a long pole with a piece of cloth tied to the top, a symbol which has the same function among

³⁹ Some account of the rituals associated with title associations has been given above. Most of the material in this section concerns the Isoko.

⁴⁰ The same word is used, with the same meaning, among some Northern Edo tribes; in Benin it is found in *Oghene n'Uke*, the Edo name for the *Oni* of Ife. The words *osolobrunu* (cf. Benin *osonobua*) and *orowakpo* (owner of the world), are also used for the high god among the Urhobo.

⁴¹ Mr. Salubi believes that this mode of address is Christian in origin. (Personal communication.)

other Edo-speaking groups. In the Agbon tribe each village has, in addition, a pole about 20 ft. high in the main street, to the top of which is tied a conical basket adorned with strips of red and white cloth. Offerings of gin are made at its foot.

PERSONAL SPIRITS AND POWERS

Each individual worships a number of personal spirits and supernatural powers.⁴² *Oghene* creates an *emema* or *emama* (from *ma*, to create) for each child at its conception which helps him in the creation of the child and is responsible for its welfare and punishment, both in this life, in successive incarnations, and in *erivi*, the spirit world. Its visible sign is a wooden image (*edo*)⁴³ called *oma* which is made in shape of a man or woman according to the sex of its owner. Every Isoko over the age of about seven has one of these. In its role of leading the child to this world (*akpo*) the *emama* is called *osu*, leader.

The *oma* image is purchased from a local carver by the mother when a child first ties on a waist cloth and she continues to make offerings of pounded yam and chalk to it, praying that the child may be allowed to grow up. Later on the object is handed to the child's sister or wife, in the case of a man, and, in the case of a girl, to her brother, or, more rarely, her husband, to worship on the "owner's" behalf. Sacrifices are made to it at times of trouble and at the instance of a diviner. The *emama* appears to correspond to the Benin concept of "*chi*."

Ezi is another personal spirit a token of which every Isoko mother should obtain for her child after puberty. Its *edo* is a twig of the *ovo* tree, adorned with a ribbon and two cowries. A woman's *eziedo* is kept in the house of her brother who serves it for her; a man's passes from his mother to his sister. Sickness is believed to be due to the withdrawal of the *ezi* (cf. Benin "*orhi*"), and in the case of very severe sickness a new twig is acquired after sacrifices and prayers have been made at the *ovo* tree.

Among other personal powers worshipped by Urhobo and Isoko are *oba*, the hand, which ensures success in work, the prevention of matchet accidents, etc., and *orchi*, which is believed to bring luck in trading.

ANCESTOR WORSHIP

The term *erivi* connotes both the spirit world and the spirits of the dead who inhabit it. At death the *ezi* leaves the world and, if the deceased was of good character and the correct mortuary rites have been completed, goes to *erivi*, which is said, by some Isoko, to be under the earth. There life is thought to continue in much the same way as on earth. Those who have left wealth and a large family behind may be free from all labour, others must fish and farm, while the poorest may beg or starve. Most individuals are eventually reincarnated. Evil spirits—those driven from *erivi* and the spirits of men and women buried in the "bad bush"—go to *erivi igbeleve* (the *erivi* of potsherds—i.e., a desolate place) whence they return to plague the living.

The ancestors are worshipped as *esemu* (father of children) and *inewo* (mothers of children). The *esemu* of each *ekwe* (elementary or compound family)

⁴² It would be inaccurate to speak of these entities as souls for, as with the *chi* and the spirits of the head and hand among the Edo of the Benin kingdom, they are regarded as being, in some sense, external to the individual.

⁴³ The word *edo* or *edjo* appears to have the same connotation as the Benin word *edo* and the pidgin word "juju". It is used of images, carved, cast, or moulded in clay, usually in the form of human beings but sometimes depicting birds, animals, fish, and reptiles which are the object of worship. Masquerade figures and stilt dancers who appear during the celebrations attending certain cults are also called *edo* or *edjo*. The word is also found in *edjorame* and *edjorameha* (water spirits and forest spirits). Finally it is used to imply "heathenism" as in the phrase *oge edjo*, "he worships idols." (Personal communication from Mr. Salubi.)

and each *aye* (extended family)⁴⁴ are represented by *ovo* (ɔvɔ) sticks placed on a broad mud wall in the compound where the family head makes offerings each rest day and whenever circumstances demand. It appears that the "family head" in this case is the senior son of the immediately deceased ancestor.⁴⁵ Until the mortuary rites have been performed he cannot mention his father's name in praying to the *asewo*. On their completion the "father" is "called home" and the eldest son is presented to him by the eldest son-in-law.⁴⁶

The *asewo* are believed to punish incest, adultery (on the part of descendants' wives), trespass, misuse of lineage land and ponds and neglect of themselves. Their aid is sought on all occasions of sickness, death, barrenness, and other calamities. Fish, goats, sheep (but not fowls, which are not valued by the Isoko), chalk, kola, and palm-wine are the usual offerings.

The *iniemo* are worshipped, among the Isoko, exclusively by women. According to Welch they are served, whenever there is trouble among the women of the family. Offerings are made in the middle of the compound or on a verandah "by the senior women of the family (lineage?)". A married woman is said to take part in these rites when visiting her father's compound, but she does not serve the *iniemo* of her husband's lineage.

The cult of tribal village and ward founders is a special form of ancestor worship. In well-integrated tribes the entire community assembles for annual sacrifices in the dry season, but in some cases villages which have broken away from the parent community worship their founders separately. Among the Urbobo it appears that even in well-integrated tribes there are separate sacrifices to village and ward founders, but Welch does not make it clear whether this is so for the Isoko. Among the latter the *asewo* (see p. 145 above) is apparently the priest of the founder's spirit. At Ole the founder's shrine is a large *irobo* tree; in some other Isoko and Urbobo tribes mud, clay, or wooden images of the founder with his wives and children decorate the shrine. Some of the elaborate annual festivals reported for Urbobo and Isoko tribes may have reference to the cults of tribal founders.

As in the Benin kingdom the ancestors or, more correctly, the predecessors of the members of corporate groups are worshipped collectively. Thus among the Isoko the spirits of past *edios* are represented by *ovo* sticks which are kept by the *adio ologbo*, who makes offerings before them. The heads of title-associations in Urbobo tribes perform similar ritual functions. Similarly the *olotu ologbo* "serves" the spirits of past *iletu*.

Finally, among the spirits of the departed, are the *ikimuomu* (from *iko*, messengers and *imuomu*, evil), spirits of the unburied dead, lepers, suicides, women who died in childbirth, and others who were thrown into the "bad bush". They return to trouble the living, especially by killing pregnant women, a disaster which necessitates purification of the market-place and the whole town. Offerings to the *ikimuomu* are scattered, with the left hand, outside villages and compounds. When a man is sacrificing to *oyise* (see above) a little is set aside for the *ikimuomu* so that they will not steal *oyise's* food.

OTHER CULTS

According to Hubbard a distinction is made between the spirits of the departed

⁴⁴ If fuller information were available it is probable that the ancestors would be seen to have a lineage rather than a family reference.

⁴⁵ Elsewhere Welch reports that the "oldest male member" is the family priest. The situation is probably analogous to that in the Benin kingdom. The senior son, by the rule of primogeniture, worships his own father. If the latter was himself a senior son, his eldest surviving brother worships their father and his ancestors on behalf of collateral lines at the same shrine until he himself dies and is himself "served" by his own senior son.

⁴⁶ If this information is correct it contrasts with the practice among the Edo of the Benin kingdom where the father's brother normally performs this duty.

and other spirits and deities who have never been incarnated in *akpo* (this world). The latter are often associated with ponds, rivers, trees, and other natural objects. Each has its priest, who is chosen by the spirit itself, the choice being indicated by possession or a series of calamities whose meaning is interpreted by a diviner.

Oto, the ground or earth, is the object of rituals among both Urhobo and Isoko. When a new settlement is founded the founder plants an *oghriki* tree which validates his claim to the land. Here the ground is worshipped and the priesthood passes down from the founder through the senior male line.⁴² The priest is called *aswo* by the Isoko. The worship of *oto* is said to be directed towards improving the fertility of the land and assuring the abundance of game. Goats, kola-nuts, palm-wine, and gin are offered at particular times of the year.

Most communities have, or had, cults directed towards success in war. At Ugheli the priest is usually a formerly successful warrior who is forbidden to go to war once he takes up the office. He blesses those going out to fight and is in charge of protective and curative medicines.

There are reports of annual festivals of an elaborate nature involving masquerades, stilt-dancers, pole-dancers, etc. These are apparently associated with special cults "owned" by village or tribal communities. Okpara, Kokori, and Oroko (Agbon tribe) have a festival called *isiokoro* which they claim was given to them by the *Oba* of Benin.

At Ugheli there is an annual rite in honour of *umalokun*, the water deity.⁴³ A highly decorated canoe, *oko umaloku*, appears on a nearby creek. In 1953 the canoe carried a placard with the inscription, "The canoe of *umalokun*, the canoe of children, the canoe of money."

Some account of the rituals of the title-associations has already been given above (see pp. 139-43).

PRIESTHOOD

Qualifications for priesthood in cults of the ancestors and of personal spirits have already been indicated. According to Welch, in the community cults of the nature deity, the deity itself is believed to select its own priest by visiting him with a series of calamities. A diviner may interpret these as a sign that the sufferer has been chosen for priesthood.

TOTEMISM

At Olomoro the crocodile and at Emevo the monitor lizard are specially revered. At Emevo the monitor lizard is called *oni mai*, "our mother"; it may eat what it likes and go where it likes. To kill one is said to bring death upon the killer and if one is hurt sacrifices must be made to the tribal founder.

DIVINING

According to Welch the diviner, *obuewa* (from *obo* = "doctor", *ewa* = a charm) is a very important figure among the Isoko. In order to become an *obuewa* a man must be apprenticed to a diviner for at least a year, working on his master's farm, fishing for him, and making gifts to him. Diviners are consulted on occasions of death and sickness, before undertaking any economic activity or litigation and in seeking to explain lack of success in any walk of life. A diviner is usually consulted before approaching a priest to make sacrifices on one's behalf.

The main method of divining is called *ibi owe* and appears to be identical with the Edo *ogwega* (see p. 59) though the terminology is different.

⁴² Personal communication from Mr. Saibui.

⁴³ This is an important cult among the Itsekiri and, as *olokù*, among the Edo and Yoruba who, however, worship it in a different way.

WITCHCRAFT

Isoko and Urhobo witchcraft beliefs resemble those of other Edo-speaking groups. Witches (*orieda*) may be of either sex and any person may be made a witch, with or without knowledge or consent, by other witches putting "medicine" into his or her food. They then stand outside the house and call for the yams or corn to come to them and the spirit of the affected person must leave its body and join them. The new witch is sworn to secrecy.

Witches are believed to be organized into corporate groups which meet regularly in iroko or other large trees. According to Salubi⁴⁴ the belief is that there may be one or more groups in each town according to its size. The leaders of such groups are usually thought of as being male, but most sources treat witches as females. Full membership of witch groups is said to be accorded only to those who have killed their own children, and to barren women. The witch must kill all her own children under puberty before attacking anyone else's. This may be done by putting "medicine" into their food, by strangling, in visible or invisible form, or by reciting the victim's name over a pot of medicine while in possession of hair, excreta, etc., from his or her body.

The ability to enter the bodies of wild animals and birds and to cause damage in that guise is another characteristic of witches and this ability is distinguished from the power accredited to certain men of changing their bodies into animal forms. While the witch's spirit is absent her body is lifeless. The killing of the animal or bird which it occupies will result in the witch's death. The owl is most frequently concerned and the Urhobo burn or drown owls in an attempt to destroy witches.

Protection from witchcraft is believed to be available in the form of *obe* or "medicine", which can be bought from "doctors". Placed in the eyes it is said to give the power of seeing witches; the latter are said to walk on their hands and eat with their feet. Men over the age of puberty are said to be able to detect bewitched food and to be immune from its effects. Welch reports that "proved" witches were formerly killed by driving a long nail through their foreheads and that in his day many were driven into the bush to die. Salubi suggests that in the past they may have been bludgeoned to death in the market place or at the entrance to a town or village. The sassawood ordeal was a common means of detecting witches.

At Usere there was, in the past, a witch-finding cult which catered for Ijaw as well as Urhobo and Isoko tribes. It was connected with the *eni* spirit which is believed to inhabit the lake of the same name. *Eni* is said to have followed the founders of the tribe from Benin and eventually to have taken possession of this lake. It was credited with the power of detecting witches and two or three times a year suspects from a very wide area were taken there. They had chalk sprinkled over them by the priest before being paddled out and cast into the lake. The innocent swam to the shore while the guilty drowned. Both Welch and Hubbard met a woman from Ire who had been among 18 women sent from her village to undergo this ordeal before it was suppressed in the early years of the present century; 10 out of the 18 are said to have died. At Ugbale it is said that if the accused proved innocent he or she had the right to sell the accuser and his family into slavery or alternatively to demand heavy compensation. The priest of *eni* was the *Ovie* of Usere and the spirit was connected with a title-association; a special group, *iko eni*, was responsible for finding the witches' corpses and burying them.

The suppression of the *eni* ordeal led, according to Welch, to the rise of new semi-Christian cults whose main objects were to smell out and exorcise witches. The *egbe igbe*, or "dancing association", was founded by an Urhobo man who claimed to have been given white chalk by *Oghene* with which to cure the sick and to detect witches. The cult spread rapidly through Urhobo and Isoko tribes and

⁴⁴ Personal communication.

priests appeared in most communities. The cult members wore only white and sat only on wooden seats; in their hands they carried goat-skin fans. White chalk blessed by the priests was alleged to make people speak only the truth and thus to force witches to confess; it had to be tasted by all members night and morning. Sins were confessed during dancing, which was an essential part of worship and during which the dancer was believed to be possessed.

The second cult, *egbe omadaka* or *everhe*, the cassava association, was founded in Urhobo country during the famine of 1929, which was believed by some Urhobo and Isoko to have resulted from the fact that no cult was addressed to cassava, the principal crop. By 1934 this cult, according to Welch, had become a society for detecting witches and had, in some places, replaced *igbe*. It was a strong proselytizing movement; worshippers "caught" by the spirit in other towns returned to their own to become priests—one male and one female in each. Dancing, which was said to help to procure food, took place twice every eight days and during the dancing witches confessed. The witch-finding reputation of the cult led communities to force all their women to join. In contrast with the *igbe* cult red was the prescribed colour; the worshippers rubbed themselves, their clothes, and their paraphernalia with red camwood dye.

Welch believed the *igbe* cult to be dying out in 1934. In fact it is still very vigorous in some places. A small village in the Ughele tribe, for example, is built round an *igbe* church. It has a hierarchy of male and female priests and regular services are held of a semi-Christian character. The congregation wear white and beat out the rhythm of their songs and dances with goatskin fans. It is not clear whether witch-finding remains one of its objects, but it has become an organized religion with a regular congregation.

CHRISTIANITY

According to Hubbard Christian Missions began work among the Urhobo and Isoko about 1910, the earliest centres being Ughele, Usere, and Igbide. At the present day there are many Christians of both Roman Catholic and Protestant persuasion.

THE EDO-SPEAKING PEOPLES OF SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIA

Scale 1/100,000

0 10 20 30

Inter-regional (or Provincial) boundary

Provincial boundary

Divisional boundary

Former kingdom or chiefdom

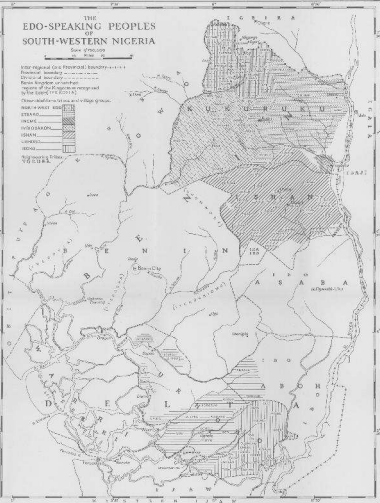
regions of the Kingdom reorganised by the 1963/64 Act

Other traditional towns and village groups



Administrative District

1963/64



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THE ITSEKIRI¹

TRIBAL AND SUB-TRIBAL GROUPINGS AND DEMOGRAPHY

LOCATION

The Itsekiri live in the westernmost part of the Niger Delta, bounded by the Bight of Benin on the west and lat. 6° N., long. 5° 45' E. and lat. 5° 20' N. The Administrative unit known as the Warri Division of Delta Province, whose area is 1,520 square miles, is approximately coterminous with the territory of the Itsekiri, though it includes groups of Ijaw settlements in the extreme north and south and of Urhobo settlements in the south-east; the latter, however, are subordinate to the Itsekiri rulers. Neighbours of the Itsekiri are: the Ilaje, a Yoruba sub-tribe, and the Apoi Ijaw, to the north-west; the Edo (Bini) to the north; the Urhobo to the east; the Ijaw to the south.

NOMENCLATURE

The Itsekiri call themselves *Itsekiri* or *isere*, and the Yoruba and Edo use the same names; the Urhobo call them *irhobo*, a term sometimes said to mean "those who float on the water"; the Ijaw call them *selemo*. In the English literature they are known as Warri or Jekri, though in the 19th century they were often referred to as Benin, since contact with them was first made on the banks of the Benin River. Warri and Itsekiri have been spelt in many different though recognizable ways by European writers, e.g., Oere, Ouere, Awerri, Owerri; Jekri, Jakri.

POPULATION

According to the 1952 Census of the Western Region of Nigeria the total population of the Itsekiri is nearly 33,000,² distributed as follows:—

Rural areas	No. of Itsekiri settlements	Itsekiri population
Warri Division:		
Ode-Itsekiri District	28	3,888
Elume District	10	1,283
Benin River District	53	6,936
Koko District	5	1,985
Ugharefi-Ugharegin District	5	650
Gborodo District	14	3,002
Gbaramatu and Ogbe-Ijaw Districts.. (Ijaw districts)		232
		<hr/> 17,756
Western Ijaw Division (excluding Burutu and Forcados)		287
Urhobo Division (excluding Sapele)		549
Aboh Division (a mainly Ibo area)		162
Benin Province		3,062
		<hr/> 4,050 ³

¹ Much of the material for this account of the Itsekiri is based on my own fieldwork in 1955-6 when I lived in Warri and visited almost all the important Itsekiri settlements. Documentary descriptions of the Itsekiri are few and consist largely of passing references in travellers' tales and government and mission despatches. I have quoted these sources only where I cannot substantiate the facts myself.

² The Itsekiri were enumerated as a separate tribe only in Delta and Benin Provinces and in the Colony.

³ The Itsekiri in Western Ijaw Division are mostly in sea coast fishing villages, those in Urhobo Division in the 19th century trading posts, and those in Benin Province in the Ologbo area and also in the old trading posts.

<i>Modern Towns</i>	<i>Total population</i>	<i>Proportion of Itsekiri (%)</i>	<i>Number of Itsekiri</i>
Warri	10,526	16	3,133
Sapele	33,638	14	4,825
Burutu	6,784	16	1,053
Forcados	3,080	17	530
			<hr/> 9,541
The Colony (including Lagos Township)	—	—	1,600
		Total	<hr/> 32,947

Density

The average density of rural population in Warri Division is approximately 25 persons per square mile, but this figure is misleading owing to the almost complete absence of settlement in the centre of the Division.

Population Changes

Earlier census figures are unreliable: in 1921 30,000 Itsekiri were enumerated in Warri (now Delta) Province and in 1931 only 7,000. It is therefore not possible to estimate the growth of the Itsekiri population; such an estimate would also be complicated by the number of mixed marriages between Itsekiri and persons of neighbouring tribes.

Sex and Age Ratio (from the 1952 Census)

	<i>Ratio of males to females</i>	<i>0-7</i>	<i>% total population</i>		
			<i>7-15</i>	<i>15-50</i>	<i>50+ years</i>
Warri Division (excluding Warri Town)	100 : 104	27	16	49	8
Warri Township	100 : 80	21	19	58	2

Some Itsekiri rural areas show a lower proportion of adults: thus in Benin River only 48% of the population is above 15 years. Settlements far from schools sometimes show a low proportion of children, suggesting that the children of school age have been sent to Warri or other settlements with schools. The modern towns such as Warri have a high proportion of men, particularly in the age group 15-50 years.

Occupational Distribution of Males (1952)

	<i>Percentage of working males</i>				
	<i>Agriculture and fishing</i>	<i>Crafts</i>	<i>Trade</i>	<i>Administrative, professional, technical</i>	<i>Other occupations</i>
Warri Division (excluding Warri Town)	63	4	10	3	20
Warri Township	4	11	37	12	37
Benin River District	72	8	10	1	7

The figures for Warri Division include Ijaw Districts in which the percentages of farmers and fishermen exceed 90, and also Koko and rural areas adjacent to Warri, where the number of labourers (classified as "other occupations") is high. Benin River District is perhaps typical of an Itsekiri rural area.

LANGUAGE

The Itsekiri speak a dialect of Yoruba. In a list of over 100 common Itsekiri words over 90% are almost identical with Yoruba words, especially those of the southern and eastern sub-tribes. Only in kinship terminology is there any marked affinity with Edo. There are a number of loan words, not only from Edo but also from Portuguese, English, and other European languages. The Itsekiri themselves assert that Itsekiri is most akin to the Ijebu dialect (largely on the basis of pronunciation and colloquialisms), rather than that of the Ijaje who are their closer neighbours.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The Itsekiri live in the mangrove swamps of the Niger Delta; few of their settlements are on land raised far above the river level or not surrounded by creeks: even Warri town itself, a distance of 30 miles from the sea, lies only 20 ft. above sea level.

TOPOGRAPHY

Three large rivers—the Benin River or Río Formoso, the Escravos or Escrados River and the Forcados River—cross the area. Only the last named is really an outlet of the Niger; the Benin River drains the southern parts of Benin and Urhobo Divisions through its tributaries the Ethiope and the Jamieson. These three rivers are connected by a dense network of creeks; Nana and Chanomi creeks are the only ones now navigable by modern ocean-going ships. As far as Warri and Sapele the creeks are tidal and deep enough for ocean-going ships to sail to these ports. At their mouths are shallow bars which appear to be continually changing their depth and shape. The relation between the current in the passage and the prevailing wind is of importance in navigation; the Benin River bar seems to have been difficult and treacherous for several centuries.⁴ The state of the bars still affects the use of the river by European shipping.

CLIMATE

The mean annual rainfall at Warri is 108 ins., the wettest months being May–October inclusive, each having at least 10 ins. of rain. In the dry season (December–February) the mean total rainfall is 5 ins. for the three months. The humidity is high. The mean monthly relative humidity at 0600 hours is below 98% only in May; even in the dry season it does not fall below 65% at mid-day. The mean daily maximum temperature ranges from 83° F. in July–August to 91° F. in February–April. Throughout the year the mean monthly minimum temperature ranges only from 71° to 74° F.

The prevalence of malaria-bearing mosquitoes was responsible for a fantastically high death rate among Europeans in the 19th century. Even at the end of the century the death rate among Europeans in the Niger Delta was nearly 10% per annum and the invaliding rate 16%.

VEGETATION

The two types of mangrove are almost the only trees found in the swamps, the white mangrove (*Avicennia nitida*) and the red mangrove (*Rhizophora spp.*). The

⁴ On two occasions in the late 18th century Landolphe had to spend five months waiting in the creeks when he delayed his departure from the Benin River until late April and thus missed the last north-east winds which alone could carry him through the narrow passage; during the wet season the prevailing south-west winds blow straight into the mouth of the river.

latter, characterised by its stilt roots, covers over 90% of the mangrove area; it is a dark-foliaged tree which can attain a height of 150 ft. These trees colonise the soft newly deposited mud, which in time is transformed into a hard carpet of the small roots; this inhibits further growth of the tall mangrove which is replaced by a tangle of low bushes (still of *Rhizophora*) and ferns tolerant of saline water. At this stage the land is flooded only at high tide; subsequent deposition, especially during floods, further raises the land so that rain forest vegetation can establish itself and replace the mangrove. It is on these dry islands within the swamps that settlements are usually found.*

MAIN FEATURES OF ECONOMY

AGRICULTURE

The swamp soils are agriculturally poor and the Itsekiri are not farmers. It is difficult to ascertain whether they cultivated in the past; in the 19th century their Urhobo slaves cultivated plantations near the settlements; the Itsekiri now term agriculture "slaves' work" and are loath to lower their status by performing it themselves. In these circumstances rights to cultivate land are ill-defined; a man merely has to notify the elders of the village before clearing a farm within the village-area.

In the drier areas cassava and maize will yield mediocre harvests. The Itsekiri have a legend that the Portuguese brought cassava to their country and told them how to grow it; they then passed the plant to the Urhobo to cultivate for them. The oil palm grows wild, but the quality of the oil produced is lower than that of inland areas. A European firm established a large palm plantation near Koko at the beginning of the century, but their lead has not been followed by the Itsekiri. The Agricultural Department is endeavouring to popularize rice-growing, but the shortage of young men in the rural areas seems to be a handicap. In the late 19th century European firms started to grow coffee and cocoa, but with little success. Several rubber plantations were made by the Itsekiri about 20 years ago.

SALT-MAKING

From the mangrove the Itsekiri formerly made salt which they sold to the Urhobo; though imported salt has largely ousted this local product there are still several dishes in which the stronger tasting salt is preferred. It was made from the leaves and shoots of the white mangrove (*igba okun*) and from the shoots and roots of the red (*ibajə*). The mangrove is burnt, water is filtered through the ashes and the resulting solution boiled until the water has evaporated. In the 19th century the mangrove cutting was performed by slaves and lack of such labour is to-day cited as a cause of the decline of the industry. It is said that salt was also obtained in the past from sea water.

LIVESTOCK AND HUNTING

Cattle of the dwarf *muturu* type are kept in several villages now, and particularly on the sandy beaches at the river mouths. Goats and sheep, pigs and poultry are ubiquitous, though losses through disease are high.

The swamps abound in wild life, but organized hunting parties are uncommon. Crocodiles in the creeks are sometimes sacred, but are elsewhere trapped and sold for food.

* See *Nigeria Handbook*, 1963, chap. xv, pp. 142-5.

FISHING

The Itsekiri are primarily fishermen. Fishing is carried out by several methods:—

(a) By a fish fence made near the river bank or across a small creek so that the fish are caught in a small pool as the tide recedes.

(b) By nets—the circular throwing net, the seine net, or the drag net.

(c) By rod and line, the rod being held by a trigger which is released by the pull of a fish on the hook and which allows the rod to spring back, leaving the fish suspended above the water.

(d) By basket traps; small baskets are hung along the banks of small creeks to face the tidal flow; large conical baskets are hung from posts which are placed in long lines across the major rivers near the mouths and also at sea behind the bar. The placing of these baskets is not only a dangerous task, as the canoe rides the waves, but also calls for a detailed knowledge of the depths at which the fish are likely to be swimming. The crayfish which, when dried, form the major export of the area are caught in this way.

The Itsekiri do not fish in the deep sea. Crayfishing in the estuaries and on the coast is the task of men, though they are often assisted by their wives; most women have a few baskets and traps in the creeks near their homes.

Disputes over fishing rights in the smaller creeks occasion considerably more litigation than rights to cultivation. Such rights are allocated by village heads and may be inherited by the grantee's male and female descendants. Many men migrate to the sea coast or the estuary for crayfishing, but they must pay heavy fees to village heads for the rights to set up their own lines of fishing posts.

CRAFTS

Although their construction is crude, there is a wide variety of types of canoe, from the shallow ones used near the sea where the river can be exceedingly rough with waves 4 ft. high, to the deeper canoes used in the placid interior creeks. Most Itsekiri canoes are now made by Ijaw. A tree is felled and hollowed by adzing where it lies; fires are made within the log and the mouth wedged as the timber expands. In the late 19th century Nana Olomu is said to have made many improvements in the design of local war canoes; many of these had elaborate superstructures. At this period large war canoes were manned by 40 paddlers and could carry a further 40 armed men; trade canoes with 20 paddlers could carry 6 tons of palm-oil. To-day few canoes reach this size.

Hoes, knives, and axes are made by local blacksmiths, but for several centuries European matchets have been imported. In the 19th century silversmiths made heavy and elaborate ornaments—bracelets and chains—often from silver dollars. This work is no longer carried on, owing probably to the absence of silver and the poverty of the Itsekiri.

Legends tell of a blue coral which "grew on trees" and Barbot refers to the export of blue coral which grew below the water. Such coral is no longer found and it is difficult to guess to what it refers. Red coral, the principal personal ornament of the Itsekiri, has always been obtained from European traders. One family in Omadina to-day claims that its ancestors were the traditional workers in coral for the *Olu*.

Women make pots in several villages, particularly Orere and Ugbuwangue. A wide variety of sizes and shapes exists, each with its own function, but the work is of poor quality compared with Yoruba pottery though equal to that of Benin.

Mat and basket making is also a women's occupation. They clear ground and plant reeds which they later harvest for making mats. Baskets are made of reeds and also from the raphia-palm. Mats of dyed reeds bound with dyed string made of raphia-palm are colourful and artistic; a mat 3 ft. by 6 ft. can be sold for between 10s. and £1.

The Itsekiri do not weave but claim to have worn imported European cloth for as long as they can remember.

Houses are built of mud where the settlement is on *terra firma*. In the mangrove swamps palm ribs are used for the walls and the plank floor is raised a foot above the ground on posts. In the Benin River District many mud houses remain; the mud was brought by canoes pulled by slaves from 40 miles away in Benin country. In mud houses the mud is packed into a framework of light but durable sticks which are placed in a double row 4 ins. apart and lashed together with cross pieces. The walls are surfaced with a special clay. Palm leaves are used for the roof. The verandah of the mud house is usually edged with beer bottles, buried neck downwards, which prevent the erosion of the foundations.

While symbolic paraphernalia of royalty and chieftaincy seem to have been copied from that of Benin, every Itsekiri house and settlement has its items of imported European domestic goods. In the most tumbledown hut far inside the creeks one may find a room furnished with dresser, rocking-chair and chandelier, with a good selection of Victorian glass and chinaware. Guarding the shrines are the huge iron cannon once used in war canoes; one of Nana's brass cannons bore the arms of Castile. Elders carry the swords, some of them Portuguese, given to their ancestors. Parts of naval uniforms often form the ceremonial dress of a chief.

TRADE

It will be clear that the mangrove swamps do not permit a subsistence economy and the siting of the earlier Itsekiri settlements on the edge of the swamps and on the borders of Urhobo country may be ascribed to their need to trade with an agricultural people.

The Itsekiri have been middlemen from at least the coming of the European traders in the 16th century. In the 19th century the English firms, which at this time monopolized the trade, anchored their hulks or built warehouses at the mouth of the Benin River. The Itsekiri had considerable success in preventing them from penetrating further into the country, while they themselves opened up Urhobo country, persuading the local inhabitants to sell them palm-oil, thereby making large profits. But with the penetration of the interior by European firms based at Warri and Sapele the Itsekiri completely lost their unique position as middlemen. Their shops which used to line the Benin River are falling into the mud; of the old houses and stores—the "factories"—of the European firms all that remain are a few posts and a distinctive patch of palms and small bushes which have colonised the area cleared of mangrove.

Cowries do not seem to have been used here to the same extent as in Yoruba country, nor were the bars of the Eastern Delta in common circulation. Trade was bilateral and goods tended to be priced in terms of the principal commodities—punchons* of palm-oil and pieces of cloth.

TRADITIONS OF ORIGIN AND HISTORY

The ethnography of the Itsekiri cannot be understood without recognizing the degree to which their culture is indebted to the neighbouring Yoruba, Edo, Urhobo, and Ijaw through migrations, conquest, intermarriage, and trade connections, and also to the Europeans with whom the Itsekiri have had a longer and more continuous contact than any other tribe of the Niger Delta.

The myths of the Itsekiri are the charter for many political rights and ritual beliefs. Most of the villages which comprise the kingdom have their own myths of

* A punchon is a wooden cask containing approximately 12½ cwt. of oil. The standard cloth length was a piece of 6 yards.

origin which tell of the *umale*,¹ a supposedly sub-human species, who used to inhabit the country, but who subsequently disappeared and have come to be deified by the Itsekiri, standing in the Itsekiri cosmology between the supreme deity and the ancestors named in their genealogies. The myths of the origin of the Itsekiri tell how Ginuwa, their founder and the first *Olu* or king, came escorted by numerous chiefs from Benin, where he was a son of the *Oba*, and settled near Ode Itsekiri, later the Itsekiri capital. Here he developed the political system which is believed to have existed until the interregnum which began in 1848. The subsequent expansion of the Itsekiri is described in the myths of individual villages.

From documentary sources we also have not only the outline of European contact with the Itsekiri but some illuminating descriptions of their capital and of the Benin River, together with numerous occasional references by which one may date or verify some of the events recounted in the myths.

THE PRE-GINUWA PERIOD

The myths which tell of the journey of Ginuwa from Benin to his new domicile in the creeks tend to infer that the country was uninhabited except for a man named Itsekiri whom the former met at Okotomo, very close to the present site of Ode Itsekiri. The origin of Itsekiri is not clear; he is presumed to have been an *umale*, but in a different category from others, for he accepted the new ruler and became integrated into the new kingdom. In their expansion from Ode Itsekiri the descendants of Ginuwa found and sometimes settled in villages inhabited by *umale*. According to the myths these creatures are said to have possessed the secret of immortality, often gained by rubbing their bodies with chalk, which enabled them to disappear into the creek and return later. The blue coral beads belonged to them, and rather than submit to the *Olu* and pay a tribute of the blue beads they are said to have thrown their chalk into the water, destroyed the "coral tree", entered their canoes and sunk into the creek never to return and leaving no descendants. In some cases the *umale* are said to have fled north and the "digging" of the major creeks is attributed to them.

Several settlements in existence to-day claim an origin distinct from the Ginuwa immigration. Thus the people of Inorin claim descent from *Umale Okun*, the sea god, one of the sons of this deity having come to land on failing to get his father's title "under the sea". Those of Gborodo, Omadina, and Urejusisi claim to have come from Ode, a Yoruba town in Ijebu Waterside. The people of Omadina still describe themselves as the children of Lenuwa, the title of the ruler of Ode. The elders of Gborodo say that their ancestors came down the coast and settled first at Amatu, 20 miles south of their present settlement. The present Lenuwa of Ode says that some of his people did migrate in the past to Itsekiri country, but he knows no details. He, however, traces the migration of his own ancestors from Benin. Ekurede is another settlement of this era, Benin being cited as the home of the immigrant founding ancestor.

The dates of all these supposed migrations are unknown, but are now popularly ascribed to the 15th century. The Gborodo people say that they arrived at the same time as the Ginuwa migration, maintaining that until recently they did not recognize the *Olu* of Warri as their king.

The settlement of Ureju and Omadina is probably as early, but the people acknowledge the *Olu* and recount with pride genealogies showing their daughters marrying into the royal lineage and bearing one of the past *Olu*; for this reason they do not often insist that they were settled in their present villages before the time of Ginuwa.

The people of Omadina claim much of the area west of their town as far as their settlements at Kantu and Jaghala; they say that the Gbaramatu Ijaw were

¹ The same word is used for spirits, see below, p. 200. It is probably derived from *Uma ale* = child of the earth.

later immigrants from the south. Descendants of Itsekiri claim land in the direction of Forcados.

The people of the settlements founded from Ode do not now co-operate as a group for any social or ritual purposes.

It seems reasonable to suppose that the early settlers in the creeks were Yoruba-speaking, having perhaps migrated there from the north-west. Culturally, however, one should regard them as "proto Yoruba", for the people of Gborodo, Omadina, etc., in common with other Itsekiri, know nothing of such Yoruba deities as *Olorun*, *Obalufon*, or *Shango*. Their new environment would have restricted severely the persistence of Yoruba crafts. Many of the Itsekiri themselves, however, would prefer to believe that Yoruba was the court language in Benin, both before and at the time of Ginuwa's departure, hence its use at Ode Itsekiri.

The Itsekiri to-day recognize no difference in culture or dialect between the settlers from Ode and the descendants of Ginuwa and his entourage. The latter still, on occasion, think of the former as *amale*, though they are obviously no less human than themselves and have in years past frequently intermarried with them.

THE ARRIVAL OF GINUWA

Itsekiri and Benin myths agree that Ginuwa was the son of Oluwa an *Oba* of Benin, who had to flee from the city, at a period that can be ascribed to the mid-15th century. Itsekiri versions say that Ginuwa was in jeopardy through the tyranny of his father; Landolphe's account of 1823 suggests a dispute for the throne between Ginuwa and a brother. The myth recounts how he was smuggled out of Benin in a wooden box, but was escorted by sons of seventy Benin chiefs. When clear of the Benin kingdom Ginuwa emerged from the box clad in his regalia and led the astonished escort to new settlements as their king. Their route is said to have been via Ugharegin down to the sea at their first settlement, Amatu, on the coast of what is now Western Ijaw Division. They later returned to Oruselemo, in a creek near Forcados, where Ginuwa took an Ijaw wife. From here they moved to Ijala, where Ginuwa died, a place which is still the royal burial ground. Ginuwa's son, Ijijen succeeded him and led his people to Okotomo; here they met Itsekiri, who acknowledged the king and gave him land near his own settlement, where he built his town and the capital of the kingdom of Warri. The two settlements were, according to Adams, distinct and separate a century and a half ago, but have since become united with the move of Itsekiri's descendants into the capital. The capital is known as Ode-Itsekiri or Ale Iwere; it is often called Big Warri or Itsekiri Olu. The Portuguese and other early traders knew the town as Warri, the origin and meaning of which name is not known.

It seems probable from the accounts of early travellers that Warri was originally a principality of Benin, of which the *Olu* was king. The Portuguese influence in the kingdom of Warri in the 17th and early 18th centuries and the decline in the power of Benin would account for the independence with which late 18th century travellers credit it. Estimates of the population of Ode Itsekiri in the past vary. Landolphe (c. 1770-90) suggested 12,000-15,000, but Adams (c. 1790) gives only 5,000 and King (1820) 3,000; the present population is less than 500, and although there are many open spaces the settlement is bounded on three sides by the creeks, so that it could never have been very large. It is difficult to estimate the lay-out of the old capital from the present buildings at Ode Itsekiri, the siting of which is almost completely post-1850.

THE EXPANSION OF THE KINGDOM

Many settlements, such as Gbolokposo, Obodo, Orere, and Elume, are said to have been founded from Ode Itsekiri. The myths of origin of some of these describe how the founder was a son of *Olu* Ijijen or of Irame his brother who, in turn, succeeded him as *Olu* (both these men being sons of Ginuwa). Others, such as

Orugbo, were founded, according to the myths, by *umale* who came to Ode Itsekiri and placed themselves under the authority of the *Olu* but were not allowed (because of their peculiar habits) to live in the capital. In some cases (e.g., Orere) a descendant of Ginuwa and an *umale* are said to have settled in a town at about the same time; here it is said that the *umale*, like others of their kind, vanished into the creeks, leaving no descendants and subsequently became sacred. All these settlements were, it should be noted, close to *terra firma* and the land of the Urhobo. Okere is said to have been founded by the remnants of a Benin army sent against Ginuwa which was overwhelmed in the waters of the creeks.

It is difficult to say when the Agbassa Urhobo moved west from Agbara-utor; from genealogies (probably much foreshortened) the migration might be placed a century and a half ago, but the Itsekiri, while asserting the recent arrival of the Agbassa, claim to have given them the cassava brought by the Portuguese. The map illustrates the proximity of the Itsekiri, the Urhobo, and the Ijaw. There is said to have been an Ijaw settlement in the 19th century on the site of the present market in Warri township.

A powerful immigrant from Ode (the Ijebu Yoruba town mentioned earlier) was, according to the legends, given the title of Iyatere.* The third Iyatere of this line, Egharegbemi, quarrelled with the *Olu* and fled, putting himself under the protection of the *Oba* of Benin and founding a settlement at Ologbo (now in Benin Province) probably in the latter half of the 18th century. From here his descendants expanded and founded their own settlements at Duwe (Koko), Obatugbo, and Abighorodo.

The most important expansion of the Itsekiri was at the end of the 18th and during the first half of the 19th centuries to the Benin River. Travellers in the 17th and early 18th centuries write of the settlements on the lower Benin River as being under governors appointed from Benin and apparently not linked with the Itsekiri of Warri. *Olu Erejuwa* (c. 1720-1800), who is reputed to have been a good king, built up the power of his kingdom, and was succeeded, probably at the turn of the 18th century, by his son Akengbuwa, who was a tyrant. Internal strife in the kingdom was probably created when, as the slave trade reached its peak, the wealth and power of senior chiefs exceeded the limits which the *Olu* could match with his own wealth and prestige. Two chiefs, Eyiamisaren, the Ologbotsere, and the Otsodi, are said to have left Ode Itsekiri during the reign of Erejuwa and founded settlements at Bobi and Olobo respectively on the lower Benin River. This part of the river is known to the Itsekiri as *okun*, the sea, and these settlements are said to have been the farthest from Ode Itsekiri to be founded, the previous seaward limit of Itsekiri journeyings being Eghoro (Young Town in 19th century descriptions). The Ologbotsere returned later to Ode Itsekiri, but his son, Uwankun, the Uwangué, offended *Olu* Akengbuwa and fled, finally settling at Jakpa. D'Arce's informant describes Bobi and Jakpa as being very small settlements in 1820. Bobi seems to have been a collecting centre whence slaves were shipped. The entrance to Bobi creek is a wide bay sheltered from the prevailing winds which blow straight up the river.

Uwala and Udolorolusan (or Iye) were daughters of *Olu* Erejuwa by Emaye; Emaye was inherited on the death of Erejuwa by *Olu* Akengbuwa and bore him two sons, Omateye and Ejo, and a daughter. Uwala founded Batere for her son Pedro and also as a potential refuge for her brothers. The trading of English firms increased the importance and the opportunities for acquiring wealth in the Benin River; later the suppression of the overseas slave trade in the 1830s increased the number of domestic slaves held by the Itsekiri.

* The Iyatere was the title of the second most senior member of the *Olu*'s council of chiefs; the most senior member was the Ologbotsere, mentioned below; the Otsodi and Uwangué are said to have been other important titles. Chieftaincy is described below, p. 183.

Olu Akengbuwa died in 1848 and within a few days Omateye and Ejo had also died, it is alleged by unnatural means. The crisis caused a mass exodus from Ode Itsekiri. The slaves and children of Omateye and Ejo went to Batere; other children of Akengbuwa founded their own settlements—e.g., Ugbu Uwangué, Usele, Jalatie, Ugbori—mostly in the Ode Itsekiri area.

Much of the 19th century history of the Benin River revolves round the rivalry of the two factions—the descendants (and their slaves) of Emaye and those of the Ologbotsere or, more especially, of those of Uwankun, the Uwangué.

From Jakpa many of the children and grandchildren of Uwankun, the Uwangué, founded their own villages. Diare, the most famous, was Governor of the River from 1851 until his death in 1870. Olomu, a son of a daughter of the Ologbotsere, founded Ebrohimi, which his son Nana, Governor 1884–91, made into the most heavily fortified town in the Niger Delta. Across the river the descendants of Emaye expanded; Chanomi, the only son of Iye, settled at Deghele; Deleketa and Kolokolo were founded from Olobe.

In addition to new villages founded by important and wealthy men which became the residences of their kin and descendants, many other settlements grew up at this period; these were merely camps for slaves and followers. Nana had several north of Jakpa, now mostly deserted, but those of Chanomi on the southern shore of the estuary are still important as crayfish centres. There are also expansions from the lower Benin River into the Koko area. The descendants of the Iyatsere settled at Ologbo do not seem to have been prominent during the 19th century.

EUROPEAN TRADE AND THE ITSEKIRI

The Portuguese do not mention Warri in their reports of the discovery of Benin in the late 15th century. Pereira (c. 1505–20) mentions a market up the Forcados River which may have been Ode Itsekiri. At the beginning of the 17th century a son of the reigning *Olu* went to Portugal for 10 years to be educated and returned with a Portuguese lady of high birth as his wife; their son, Antonio Domingo, was *Olu* in the 1640s. Roman Catholic mission societies sent several priests to Warri in the late 16th and 17th centuries, though the climate took a heavy toll. At this period the Itsekiri were reported by Dapper to be a very religious people, with several persons literate in Portuguese. Negro priests (Brazilians) later came to Ode Itsekiri. Evidence of Christian influence—a chapel, a wooden cross, and ritual objects in the palace—were visible at the end of the 18th century.*

Portuguese traders seem to have travelled direct to Warri probably up the Forcados River, the shortest route. Fawcner reports Portuguese ships at Gwatto as late as 1825. But the English firms who traded for oil in the 19th century remained at the mouth of the Benin River. At first, from c. 1830, they moored their ships in Bobi Bay, and later built factories, mostly at intervals along the north bank on either side of the present Jakpatie. Slowly, and travelling from the Benin River, they discovered Ode Itsekiri for themselves, but it was not until the 1870s, with the search for a new route to the Niger, that the Forcados River was again used as a route to the interior. The Itsekiri then drove the European firms from the Ode Itsekiri area in 1873 lest they should encroach on their territory as middlemen. The Itsekiri established their own trading posts and beaches up the Warri River and more especially the Ethiope and Jamieson Rivers, thus opening up Urhobo and part of Benin country for trade. While the Urhobo resented Itsekiri power they were too backward and unorganized to combat their fast war canoes.

Not until the late 1880s did the British firms again penetrate inland, but from 1891 the Government of the Niger Coast Protectorate established consular posts and

* Further details of this period are contained in Dapper, Lloyd and Ryder, Landolphe and Adams.

administrative offices at Warri (the new township) and Sapele. Forcados was at the end of the century not only a port of trans-shipment for the Niger, but also for Lagos, whose bar was still impassable. Burutu was later developed to become the port of the United Africa Company. These four towns were all entirely new creations (though the present boundaries of Warri include the Itsekiri settlements of Okere and Odion and the Urhobo settlement of Agbassa) and to them not only the Itsekiri but also the Urhobo and Ibo have flocked in search of employment. Of these towns only Warri is built on land held by legal decisions to be part of the Itsekiri kingdom.

Thus the Benin River, with a bar impassable to modern ships, has been bypassed and has reverted to its fishing economy, although the shades of its 19th century glory still persist vividly in the minds of its inhabitants. The Escravos bar is now the easiest to cross; most ships now use it to reach Burutu and plans are being made for its improvement by the Nigerian Government. The Escravos River, having as its hinterland the uninhabited swamps of the central part of Warri Division, had not been important to earlier overseas traders and the people of Gborodo and the adjacent settlements founded from it have always remained in a backwater. Gborodo and Ogidigben are not marked on maps showing the Escravos Estuary before the end of the 19th century though they certainly existed and were both close to the sea.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND POLITICAL SYSTEM

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The Settlement

Itsekiri villages fall into three groups—Ode Itsekiri itself, the older settlements, and the late 18th and 19th century settlements.

Ode Itsekiri to-day bears little resemblance to the town as described by Adams at the beginning of the 19th century. Writers of his period describe it as a large town with buildings similar in construction and layout to those of Benin City; a large palace is mentioned. To-day the palace, in the centre of the village, consists of two small buildings, recently reconstructed, and an older building said to have been the residence of the *Olu's* wives. The uneven ground, however, suggests ruins of an earlier palace here. The present *Olu* lives at Ekurede, a village on the outskirts of Warri and hence accessible by road. The town is divided into three quarters—Irigbo, Ogbe, and Eghoro-oroke. Irigbo is the settlement of the descendants of Itsekiri, the original inhabitants of the place; Ogbe is the quarter of the *Iyatsere*, although most of the buildings now standing are the houses and shrines of the descendants of Emaye, a daughter of Egharegbemi, the *Iyatsere*. Eghoro-oroke contains the compounds of the *Odofin* and the *Otsoron*; the elders here claim that their ancestors came to Ode Itsekiri with *Ginuwa*. Within Eghoro-oroke are also the sub-quarters of Eghoro-egbin and Eghoro-olobite; the former is the quarter of the *Ologbotsere* and the latter of *Udefi*. Both are to-day very small, but continue to be the burial places of the descendants of these lineages. The quarter of the *Ilekun* is now deserted. Another small quarter, known as *Saton* after the Portuguese—from St. Thomas—who are said to have lived there, is the seat of the *Ero*.

The older settlements, such as Orugbo, Orere, Inorin, usually consist of a number of small houses rather irregularly sited. Each house is rectangular, comprising three rooms—a large parlour in the centre with a room at each end used as sleeping apartments or kitchen and store; there is a small verandah. The houses of an extended family are sometimes grouped around an open square. The villages are usually divided into quarters, each being the residence of the descendants of

different sons of the founder of the settlement; the boundaries of the quarter are not apparent to a visitor. In the central part of the village is the hall—a rectangular open-sided building used for public meetings and ceremonies in connection with the founders of the village.

The newer settlements have a more regular plan and are usually dominated by large rectangular compounds. These are often spaced regularly along a wide street. Each compound consists of the house of the family head (usually with its back to the street), and facing it, 20 yds. or more away, the shrine of his father. On either side are detached houses or long buildings containing the rooms of his wives and children. In the centre is a hall, the roof supported by posts, though there may sometimes be a low wall, where dances take place during festivals. The compound is often completely enclosed by a wall connecting the outer walls of the building; a gateway is then provided in a corner adjacent to the family head's house. These compounds are to-day said to have been built by wealthy men of the last century; they are now inhabited by one or more of the most senior among their descendants. Such compounds are no longer being built. Rich men invest instead in modern houses in Warri and Sapele and the remainder build small three-roomed houses.

No detailed survey was made of the relationship of the inhabitants of any of the older villages to the founders of the settlement, but enquiries suggested that generally half the inhabitants traced patrilineal descent from the founder while the rest are connected through maternal links. A survey of a new village on the outskirts of Warri yielded the following results:—

The village was founded c. 1850 by Y. and his sister A. Y. probably lived c. 1800–c. 1870. Of the 42 adult male inhabitants 17 were strangers (one Itsekiri unrelated to the village, nine Urhobo, four Ibo, one Yoruba, one Ishan). Of the remaining 25, 15 traced patrilineal descent from Y. (no sons, five grandsons, 10 great-grandsons) and three from A. (one grandson, one great-grandson, one great-great-grandson). Of the seven other persons, one is the son of a daughter of Y., four are sons of daughters of daughters of Y., and the last is a son of the daughter of A.'s son. Several sons of Y. founded their own villages where most of their own descendants now live; other descendants of Y. and A. have migrated to the modern towns. Those living in the parent village thus form only a small minority of the descendants of Y. and his sister A.

The Patrilineage

As shown above, usually half or more of the adult male inhabitants of a settlement trace patrilineal descent from its founder. While a man usually resides in his father's village exceptions are numerous. On marriage a wife joins her husband; it is rare for a man to live in his wife's village.

There seems to be no single Itsekiri word to designate the patrilineage. There are no ceremonies at birth which formally admit a child to membership of his patrilineage; the umbilical cord is buried in the house where the mother delivered the baby (not necessarily the father's house); facial marks are not distinctive as between one lineage and another and are cut by any native doctor. Male circumcision is performed in infancy by an expert; it is not a ritual occasion. Food taboos are to-day observed in very few lineages. On reaching middle age a man may adopt an appellation—a nickname used in saluting him in public—held previously by his father or paternal grandfather. It is rare to adopt an appellation of a maternal grandfather. At ceremonies performed for an ancestor it is usual for patrilineal descendants to sit on the right of the family head, and descendants through female lines on his left. In new settlements, while the family head is usually, he is not necessarily a patrilineal descendant of the founder. In old settlements the priest of the *umale* is nearly always a patrilineal descendant of the village founder. When a man dies, his body, or at least the hair and nails, are buried in the house or quarter of his patrilineal ancestor. This seems to be an almost invariable rule and the only

certain indication of the patrilineage of the man who participates in a large number of kin groupings.

On his death, a man's eldest son should become his priest (*omo okpanran*) and officiate in all ceremonies to celebrate the deceased.¹⁰ He usually inherits a double share of his father's property; he takes those objects which symbolized his father's headship of the family and takes custody of corporate property (e.g., rights to land, fishing areas, titles). Other movable property, e.g., clothing, coral and silver ornaments, slaves, canoes, is shared equally between sons; in the absence of sons daughters inherit the whole movable property and, even where there are sons, will usually be given a small share of it. Movable property will pass to a brother of the deceased only in the absence of children or as gifts.

The patrilineage rarely acts as a unit in the social system; its members never meet as a distinct group, but always together with the others tracing maternal links with the lineage. Since land and fishing rights are not important—there being ample space for all and rights being freely given to those claiming maternal relationships with the settlement—and since most chieftaincy titles before 1848 were probably not hereditary,¹¹ the corporate property held by a lineage is not often of vital importance to a man.

That the patrilineage is more than an anthropologist's concept, however, is evinced by the division of participants in ceremonies to ancestors (including those who founded the settlement) into patrilineal descendants and maternally related descendants—they sit on opposite sides of the priest—and also by the rigid rule of burying a man's body in the compound or quarter of his most remotely traced patrilineal ancestor,¹² a rule which operates irrespective of his membership of the descent groups described below.

Descent Groups or "Houses"

Itsekiri claim affiliation to groups of kin by descent in both male and female lines. A person may not marry anyone descended from a common ancestor within seven generations, i.e., one may not marry any descendant of one's 128 great-great-great-great-great grandparents. Beyond this one may marry remote kin.¹³ All those persons with whom one can trace relationship within seven generations are termed *eguere*; sexual intercourse between such persons is considered incestuous.

An Itsekiri enquires about descent by asking "To what *ebi* (or *ubi*) do you belong?"¹⁴ In reply one gives the names of the most important of one's ancestors in descending order of their fame and irrespective of the number of maternal links in the sequence by which the relationship is traced. It is often only on specific questioning that a man will trace his patrilineal descent. A man will usually rank high in his list of ancestors the founder of the village or quarter in which he lives.

No man knows his full genealogy for seven generations. In practice even the best local historians cannot cite the names of more than six or eight at most ancestors at a distance of four generations from them and trace only one or two

¹⁰ The priest is now often a juvenile descendant of the deceased. See p. 201, below.

¹¹ And chieftaincy lapsed for 88 years after this date.

¹² A son of an *Olu* is often buried in the compound of his mother's father; see below, p. 193.

¹³ The Itsekiri claim that a man may, unless a family head or chief, marry a woman tracing patrilineal descent from a common ancestor beyond seven generations. But this genealogical knowledge, described below, is limited and rarely is such a distant relationship traced.

¹⁴ The difference between the terms *ubi* and *ebi* seems slight; the former is sometimes used when greater generation depth is indicated.

lines to a full seven generations.¹⁵ One does not know the ancestry of non-Itsekiri wives (often slaves) and the antecedents of persons of no fame (and especially of slaves) are socially unimportant and hence forgotten. One traces back one's ancestry furthest in these lines of greatest fame, guided here by the fact that the genealogies of the legendary heroes are well known.

One finds, therefore, a large number of mixed descent groups (*ebi*) for which the word "House" is often used now by literate Itsekiri. The most important of these to-day (i.e., those of which an Itsekiri is anxious to claim membership) are the descent groups of *Olu Erejuwa* and his son *Olu Akengbuwa*,¹⁶ *Udefi*, *Eyinmisaren* the *Ologbotsere* and *Egharegbemi* the *Iyatsere*.

Excepting in those old settlements said to be founded by sons of *Ijijen* or *Irame*, one does not find descent being traced from any *Olu* before *Atowogbuwa*, the predecessor of *Erejuwa* and only a few lines from him. Yet the past *Olu* are said to have been polygynous and prolific. Many elders of to-day are only four generations descent from *Erejuwa*. *Udefi*, the ancestor of one of the big descent groups, is said to have been the son of an *Olu* who voluntarily abdicated the throne on account of his age. The *Otsodi*, the grandson or great-grandson of *Udefi* (genealogies are conflicting) was a contemporary of the *Ologbotsere* who founded *Bobì* in the late 18th century. Thus genealogies give only six generations from *Udefi* to the children of *Nana* who are elders to-day. Although the first *Ologbotsere* is said to have come with *Ginuwa*, only three holders of this hereditary title are known. No descendants of the first two *Ologbotsere* are traced—each had no known children besides the one who succeeded him. *Eyinmisaren* the third (who lived during the 18th century) is said to have had nine children (six sons and three daughters) from whom all members of the "House" trace descent. Several elders alive to-day are only descendants of *Eyinmisaren* of the fourth generation. Similarly *Iyatsere Egharegbemi* (probably a contemporary of *Ologbotsere Eyinmisaren*) was the third to hold this title, his father and grandfather having preceded him, yet descent is traced from him alone. Thus, in the large "houses" descent is traced from an ancestor who is separated from living elders by at most six and sometimes only three generations. In the older settlements some informants, in tracing their patrilineal descent, could name seven forebears before reaching the founder of the village; while others could name only three or four. In these older settlements, and even where descent was traced from the founder through only four generations, it was held that marriage between persons of different quarters (i.e., the descendants of different sons of the original founder), was legitimate—presuming, of course, that no more recent relationship was traced.

Kinship Terminology

<i>baba kporo</i>	.. .. .	..	..	..	..	grandfather.
<i>nene kporo</i>	.. .. .	..	..	..	..	grandmother.
<i>baba</i> or <i>asa</i>	(possessive: <i>asa mi</i>)	..	..	..	..	father.
<i>nene</i> or <i>ore</i>	(possessive: <i>iye mi</i>)	..	..	..	..	mother.
<i>ama</i>	.. child	{	<i>ama-onkoren</i>	..	..	son.
		{	<i>ama-onobiren</i>	..	..	daughter.

Elder brothers of one's mother or father are addressed as father, one's parents' younger brother are *baba tie*, and younger sisters are *nene tie*. Thus a father's brother younger than oneself is called father.

¹⁵ Some Itsekiri elders claimed that their genealogical knowledge was important in sanctioning the marriages of their grandchildren, thus they could trace seven generations of ascent from these young people but only five generations from themselves.

¹⁶ The descent group of *Akengbuwa* is of course part of that of *Erejuwa*; within those two is the historically important "House of *Emaye*," *Emaye* being wife to *Erejuwa* and *Akengbuwa* in turn.

Colloquially the above terms are used for all siblings of grandparents, parents, and children; otherwise descriptive terms are used to define particular relationships. Omoneukanrin¹⁶ states that one uses the term *daba* for all siblings of one's father irrespective of sex, and similarly *nen* for all one's mother's siblings. This was denied by several Itsekiri, but may represent an old custom now being replaced by the use of the terms according to the sex of the individual and not that of the parent through whom he (or she) is related. There is no term to differentiate senior or junior siblings of one's own generation.

oko .. husband (also used by a wife of her husband's junior brothers and sisters; on the death of a man his wives are inherited by his junior brothers and sons, never by an elder brother).

obiren or *aya* .. wife.

ina (possessive *ana mi*) .. in-law.

The Itsekiri have terms by which one can describe the number of generations by which one is separated from a stated ancestor:—

The sons and daughters of a man are	<i>orima</i>	to him ..	1st generation
.. grandchildren	.. <i>eya</i>	..	2nd ..
.. g.-grandchildren	.. <i>imamasima</i>	..	3rd ..
.. g.-g.-grandchildren	.. <i>itsantoko</i>	..	4th ..
.. g.-g.-g.-grandchildren	.. <i>nesiebieyi</i>	..	5th ..
.. g.-g.-g.-g.-grandchildren	.. <i>ekperifonomiren</i>	..	6th ..
.. g.-g.-g.-g.-g.-grandchildren	.. <i>arewolifuna</i>	..	7th ..

For reasons stated above, the last two terms are rarely needed. Persons descended from a common ancestor through the same number of generations describe each other as *oriko*.

Within any village those women related to it by birth are called *omaphoro* (lit. children of the quarter) and those related by marriage *ebirengoro* (lit. wives of the quarter). A man unrelated to the village must be termed a stranger.

The Segmentation of Descent Groups

Segments of the descent groups described above are called *igogo*, a word which is also used to refer to a woman's genitals (and also the anus). This derives from the fact that within the polygynous family there is the basic distinction between children of one mother and those of one father; the former are known as *omere ifun* and the latter as *egusa*. The term *omere* is also used to designate any person with whom one's common ancestor, at whatever generation depth, is a woman; similarly *egusa* designates relationship through a male ancestor. *Omere* can be used even where the descendants of a woman are of different husbands. Thus, although Emaye was wife to *Olu Erejuwa* and *Olu Akengbuwa* in turn, all her descendants are *omere* to one another. Descendants of an *olu*, or of any other man, by different wives are *egusa* to one another.

The tie between *omere* is considerably stronger than between *egusa*. A man may, if appropriate, greet a kinsman "*omere*," but will not use *egusa* in such a way.¹⁷

To the Itsekiri the term *igogo* should theoretically only be used to describe the segmentation in a group of kinsmen descended from a woman; the descendants of each of her children forming one *igogo*. Using this term, a sentence meaning "How many children did X bear" can also be translated "How many segments did X produce". Emaye, cited several times above, had five children, and the "House of Emaye" is often called *igogo marun* (*marun*=five). Similarly,

¹⁶ *Itsekiri Law and Custom*, 1942.

¹⁷ An educated informant was describing how the elders protested against his marriage to a woman related to him—he was *imamasima* and she *itsantoko* to the common male ancestor. "But," he added, "we are only *egusa*; it would have been far worse had we been *omere*" (i.e., he and his wife were descended from the common ancestor through different wives).

Iwereko and Ameren were daughters of Ologbotsere Eyinmisaren by the same wife; Iwereko bore Olomu and five other children while Ameren had one son. When Olomu founded Ebrohimi the other children of Iwereko and that of Ameren joined him; the whole group were *igogo meje* (*meje*=seven).

It is said by the Itsekiri that one cannot divide the descendants of one man into *igogo*, for a man has so many children. The more famous men had so many wives that a recognized segmentation on such a basis (i.e., the descendants of one wife) would be equally unmanageable. Segmentation, to be effective, must be into a small number of units only. An exception here is the segmentation of the major descent groups. The nine known children of Ologbotsere Eyinmisaren and their descendants are known as *igogo mesan* (*mesan*=nine; some elders say that there were 10 children, but that the daughters, Iwereko and Ameren, being born of one mother, count as one, the other eight children each having a different mother). A similar exception operates in the case of Iyatsere Egharegbemi and his descendants.

In the case of segmentation of a group descended from a woman (e.g., the House of Emaye) not only are the members of each segment *omere* to one another but the members of one segment are *omere* to those of all the remaining segments; but where the group is descended from a man (e.g., the Ologbotsere), while the members of each segment are *omere* to one another, the members of one segment are *egusa* to those of the other segments.

Often a descent group is described as *ebi X.*, and a famous man's name is given. On investigation it is nearly always found that the group referred to comprises the descendants of X. together with those of his *omere ifun*—full brothers and sisters. X himself may not have been the eldest, but his wealth was probably such that his own descendants outnumber the rest. When a rich man founded a new settlement he usually took his brothers and sisters with him; it is sometimes added that he wished to make a comfortable home for his mother in her old age, though some Itsekiri women were rich enough to have taken a leading part in founding the settlement. (In the village whose social composition was given above, Y. and A. were *omere ifun*, A., the woman, being the elder of the two). Cases do occur (one is cited below) where the members of different segments descended from a single mother quarrel and, while recognizing a common origin, meet separately.

Of the segmentation in the older settlements into the descendants of each of the sons of the village founder, nothing more need be said here. The members of these villages belong to the large descent groups mentioned above.

Family Meetings

While a man can belong to only one patrilineage, it will be seen from the previous sections that he can belong to a large number of descent groups—theoretically to 128, though in practice a man's genealogical knowledge (i.e., what he remembers easily himself without the assistance of elders especially competent by their own descent to continue the genealogy to its full depth) limits the number of descent groups acknowledged by him to 12 or less. It would be impossible for a man to participate equally fully in all his descent groups. In practice he will probably be active in one or two, attending meetings of one or two others, willingly supporting another one or two without attending meetings and sending a contribution to any of the rest only when they choose to remind him of his membership.

A man's prime allegiance will probably be to the descent group and segment associated with the settlement in which he permanently resides (presuming that he is a member of it). But one-third of the Itsekiri now live in Warri, Sapele, and other modern towns, and this third includes a high proportion of the young adult men and the majority of those in the tribe with initiative and personality. Many family meetings are held in these towns and those resident there are not concerned with problems of transport as is the rural Itsekiri who wishes to attend meetings with kinsmen in distant villages. In addition, a man's sympathies are likely to lie

more with the descent groups and segments of those parents and grandparents with whom he lived when young, than with the groups of those with whom he has had little contact. The fact that the genealogies of famous men are incorporated in popular legends, lines of descent traced through such men consequently being of greater generation depth, and the desire to be associated with the great heroes, leads most men to participate in the large descent groups described above. Even among these there is competition for adherents. The present chief *Udefi* is trying to uphold the glory of the descent group of the original *Udefi*; within the patrilineage of *Udefi* were *Chanomi* and *Olomu*, none of whose descendants, says the present chief, troubles to attend his meetings. *Chanomi* rose to fame probably through the influence of his mother and his own allegiance was to the royal family and to the House of *Emaye* in particular. *Olomu* grew up in *Jakpa*, the town where his mother lived with several of his brothers, and then founded his own town; since *Nana's* rise and fall his children have remained aloof from much of *Itsekiri* activity, but the members of the *igogo meje* still feel their closest links with the *Ologbotsere* descent group. The trans-Benin River rivalry between the House of *Emaye* and that of *Ologbotsere* (whose feuds still colour personal relationships to-day) probably encouraged the *Itsekiri* to declare their allegiance to one faction or the other.

To-day it is rare for an *Itsekiri* living in *Warri* or *Sapele* to assert, with little or no prompting, his relationships with one of the old *Itsekiri* settlements; on the least provocation, however, he will explain his descent from a 19th century hero.

Of all associations, the "family meeting" (*egware ebi*) is, to an *Itsekiri*, the most important. Meetings may be called at every level of segmentation. Descendants of *Erejuwa* (including those of *Akengbuwa*) may gather to decide the attitude of the royals towards non-royals; descendants of *Ologbotsere Eyinmisaren* will meet to consider the candidates for the title or to perform ceremonies to their famous ancestor. But such meetings are rare. Meetings of minor segments, however, are often held monthly or even weekly, the most constant and united in their activities being the segments whose founder is grandmother of the elder living members. Here the ties of close kinship and the probable existence of a single powerful group are cohesive factors. The success of larger segments often depends on the personality of the family head. *Dore Numa*, Paramount Chief of the *Itsekiri* and a most forceful character, could successfully summon a meeting of the descendants of *Emaye* (the *igogo marum*, of which he was head). After his death a split occurred between the descendants of *Emaye's* children by *Olu Erejuwa* (i.e., *Uwala*, who bore *Numa*, father of *Dore*, and *Udolorolusan*, who bore *Chanomi*) and those by *Olu Akengbuwa* (*Omaleye*, and *Ejo*, and a daughter; a grandson of *Ejo* became *Olu* in 1936). An informant from the former group accused the latter of trying to dominate the family meeting, to the exclusion of his own group. For a similar reason the descendants of *Uwala* and *Udolorolusan* fell apart. The children of *Uwala* still hold regular meetings. *Uwala* had one son by her first husband and two daughters and *Numa* by her second. In theory every segment is equal, both in its rewards and its duties, and should make equal financial contributions to any fund. The descendants of *Numa* far outnumber those of the other three children of *Uwala*; the former usually offer to pay half of any sum required, which pleases the smaller group and prevents quarrels which might lead to secession.¹²

The functions of these meetings are mainly social, their explicitly political functions being limited to the election of a chief if the title is their corporate property. At the meetings are discussed the personal affairs of members; e.g., proposed marriages which the elders must ensure are not incestuous; the commission of offences against the ancestors, such as incest or neglect of food taboos; individual infringement of the *Itsekiri* mores which might bring the group into disrepute. Perhaps the most important topic is the building or repair of the ancestor shrine

¹² If the smaller group did secede it would lose the prestige of belonging to a well-known segment.

and the organization of annual ceremonies there. These are often most costly and are intended to display to other Itsekiri the group's affluence and loyalty to its ancestors. Where a descent group or its segments live in a single village or quarter, its meetings will also deal with the local government of this territorial unit.

In the old settlements the family meetings are conducted modestly, honouring ancestors of long ago known only from vague myths and not the flamboyant legendary figures of the 19th century, almost all of whom seem to have lived in the newly founded settlements.

Family meetings are presided over by the family head (*olori ebi*), the oldest male of the most senior generation. He need not be—though he usually is—a patrilineal descendant of the apical ancestor. He was often in the past the priest (*omo okpanran*) of the ancestors. At a meeting of Uwala's descendants held in Warri, the oldest living son of Numa presided; on his left sat a young boy, the present priest of Numa, and on his right the priestess of Uwala, herself a daughter of Numa.

Seniority within the descent group is determined by the genealogical level of each individual in relation to generations from the founding ancestor. It often happens that a young man (e.g., a younger son of a younger son) is senior to a much older man (e.g., an eldest son of eldest son of eldest son); the latter must respect the former's rank, though the younger man ought to give the older the deference due to his age. Since most children are born to men when they are aged 25-65, but to women when they are aged 15-35, patrilineal descendants of the ancestor are likely, as a group, to be higher in rank than those with maternal links.¹¹

POLYGYNY, MARRIAGE, AND DIVORCE

The Itsekiri are polygynous. No statistics are available, but it seems likely that in the old settlements wives were fairly evenly distributed among the men, few of whom could thus have had more than two. The village head and priest were not wealthy men with large harems.

The *Olu* and senior chiefs in Ode Itsekiri before 1848 and later traders in the Benin River and Warri areas did, however, have a large number of wives, composed partly of slaves. Adams estimates that the *Olu* whom he met had about 60 wives; Moore lists 18 children of Erejuwa and 25 sons and 19 daughters of Akengbuwa. To the Itsekiri the number 71 has special significance and important men are usually said to have either this number of children or even more. No reliable figures exist; Nana claimed that his father had 84 children besides himself; Numa, who died an old man in 1893, had thirteen children still alive in 1956. These high figures contrast markedly with the small numbers whose names are remembered in genealogies, and indicate an elimination of childless persons and of those who lose contact with the descent group, and the possible conjunction of all the children of a woman under the name of one child. Polygyny on this scale has had a determining effect on the social structure.

If the Itsekiri's genealogical knowledge allowed them to observe rigidly the ban on marriage with a spouse related within seven generations, it would be quite difficult to find a partner, even in a society where polygyny was slight. The problem apparently did arise, for a myth tells how a royal princess heroically suffered death to atone for the sins of future generations; as a result of her sacrifice the penalty for marriage within these limits was reduced from death to a flogging, expiatory sacrifices to the ancestors, and a reduced participation in ancestral rites. Polygyny in the 19th century produced the mammoth descent groups; nearly every Itsekiri now belongs to one or two and may belong to four or more. To find an

¹¹ This is modified sometimes when old women outlive men of their own generation.

Itsekiri woman who belongs to none of one's own groups is an impossibility for many men

In the past marriage partners were not only expected to be virtuous, industrious, and healthy, but marriage was discouraged with those suspected of being descended from *umale*. This superstition no longer exists, but there is a modern preference for "noble birth," calculated from one's genealogical distance from the 19th century heroes.

In the 19th century and earlier the marriage problem was partially solved by the slave trade. There was probably intermarriage with the neighbouring Urhobo and Ijaw whom the Itsekiri met at markets; the genealogies cite several well-known women as non-Itsekiri—the mother of Emaye herself is said to have been an Ijaw. To-day the educated Itsekiri, in an effort (so they believe) to rescue the Itsekiri from future oblivion, call for increased marriage within the tribe and for "racial purity".

Itsekiri marriage-payments are small. Apart from presents made to the girl and her parents during the period of courting, a man by tradition had to provide one case of gin and some kola-nuts to be used in a ceremony where the family head invoked the blessing of the ancestors on the marriage, and three cases of gin to be shared by the mother and father if the girl proved to be a virgin on her marriage night. The units of gin here refer to the trade gin of the 19th century; the first payment is now made with one bottle of imported gin, and the second, which has come to be regarded as a fee for deflowering the girl (paid by whoever performs it, whether in or out of wedlock), with a cash payment of £3.

Divorce is said to have been rare in the past, though separation was perhaps common. A ceremony performed before the ancestors to solemnize marriage can never, according to strict custom, be revoked; a woman must wait for the death of her husband before being permitted to solemnize marriage in this way with any other man.²⁰ A union in which gin and kola are not offered to the ancestors is regarded as concubinage, by which a man has rights to the children of which he is the biological father and rights to the woman's labour while she chooses to live with him, but not the sole right of sexual access to her. If the woman deserts the man he has no redress in law, though public opinion will not support a man who seduces a woman who has for several years lived continuously and faithfully with a lover, bearing him children and performing in fact all the duties of a wife.

Pre-marital sexual intercourse or adultery with a relative within the prohibited degrees is not seriously punished to-day; the plea of ignorance of their relationship by the parties is accepted and they are warned by the elders to discontinue their practices.

These marriage prohibitions have obliged many Itsekiri to resort to concubinage in lieu of marriage. This has led to instability, for the woman has had no marriage-payment to refund to her lover and he has had no legal right to retain her. Cases of adultery taken to Native Courts usually involved the question of whether the ceremony to the ancestors had been performed correctly, i.e., whether the woman was a wife or a lover; in most cases she was only a lover. In an effort to remedy this, Paramount Chief Dore ruled that, in cases held in Native Courts, marriage between *itsaniso* of a common ancestor or of persons of a more remote relationship was to be considered legal, and that continuous cohabitation between lovers for two years, or the birth of a child, was to be regarded as marriage for the purpose of claiming adultery damages. A woman is, of course, still free to leave her husband or lover if she feels a real grievance against him and if she can find another man to pay, in the Native Court, for the damages and repayments

²⁰ A man may solemnize marriage with several wives. This restriction on the women is now ascribed by some Itsekiri to Roman Catholic mission influence.

demand. Chief Dore's reforms were designed to protect the liaisons of *bona fide* lovers from the activities of promiscuous flirts. The Native Court precepts do not imply that the ancestors sanction the liaisons of lovers related to one another and those who offend against their code must still expect to incur their displeasure. Many educated young men are not opposed to the marriage of *itsantsoko* where the relationship is difficult to trace, but few of these would marry within closer degrees of relationship.

As noted above, a man has rights over any child of which he can claim biological paternity. The child will answer to his name, inherit from him (though it is said that sons of women married to a man will dispute the right to a full share of children born to lovers), and be buried in the compound of his patrilineage, whether or not he was the legal husband of the mother at the time of the child's conception or birth. Most men value the sons born to their lovers; some have no other sons at all. Conversely an Itsekiri has a horror of rearing a child born for another man. The ritual motive for ascertaining and acknowledging the paternity of a child lies in the punishment which the ancestors will inflict on any person who, not being descended from them, participates under false pretences in sacrifices made to them.

Thus a child is rarely considered a bastard and given in custody to its mother and her parents; such only happens when paternity is genuinely in doubt, as with the children of prostitutes. Of the numerous mulatto children born to Europeans by Itsekiri women most until recently bore their father's name, whether or not the father ever cared for the child, for the union was often one of concubinage over a considerable period. The children grow up in their mother's compound, however, and participate in ceremonies there as fully as their maternal relationship will allow; the men in their later years often bemoan their lack of a patrilineage, but no stigma ever attaches to their colour; their status is higher than that of a son born to an immigrant African with whose country and family he has no contacts. To-day mulatto children are often the product of prostitution, but relatively few such children are born to Itsekiri women.

POLITICAL SYSTEM

The political structure of the Itsekiri kingdom has undergone many changes in the last 150 years. *Olu* Akengbuwa died in 1848 and no *Olu* was installed to succeed him until 1936. Most chieftaincy titles seem to have lapsed before the death of Akengbuwa; Eyinnisaren, the last Otogbotsere, and Egharegbemi, the Iyatsere, probably died in or before the early years of the 19th century. The title "Governor of the River" was bestowed by the British on the most powerful and influential man, his duty being to maintain law and order and protect trading interests; Diare, the first Governor, was appointed in 1851; Nana, the last Governor, relinquished the title in 1891. After 1897 Warrant Chiefs were appointed to sit in the Native Courts and on Native Councils; latterly each village provided a leading, though not always its oldest, elder for this office. Dore Numa, who was at first Political Agent, was later recognized as Paramount Chief of the Itsekiri. An *Olu*, Ginuwa II, was again installed in 1936; he filled only a few chieftaincy titles, but his successor, Erejuwa II, has endeavoured to provide his kingdom with the 70 chiefs according to tradition. Some of these chiefs sit as Traditional Members on the Local and Divisional local government councils; warrant chiefs have been deprived of their council duties, but still retain their court membership.

The Itsekiri know very little about the political system as it existed before 1848, and in these circumstances genealogies and legends are used, often unscrupulously, to justify present claims to a title. Ceremonies, too, have been forgotten and the present *Olu*, a sincere Christian, does little to revive them.

The King

The *Olu* of the Itsekiri, as a descendant of the *Oba* of Benin, is regarded as a divine king. The title is hereditary in the patrilineage of Ginuwa, but the exact mode of its inheritance in the past is uncertain. From Ginuwa the kingship passed to his two sons in turn; but little is known about the *Olu* who reigned from this period to the accession of Erejuwa, probably in the mid 18th century. The legends about Oyenakpara (17th century) are concerned more with his visits to Europe than his rights to the title. It seems agreed that an *Olu* should have been born to a free woman, not a slave, while his father was on the throne. Some informants say that the title always passed to a son of the deceased *Olu*, while others say that it passed to a son of an earlier ruler, suggesting the existence of two segments in the royal lineage.²¹ The selection of the *Olu* elect was determined by the *ifa* oracle, consulted by the members of the royal lineage; the ratification by the chiefs was necessary before the ceremonies of installation could begin. Erejuwa II succeeded to his own father and it seems likely that an *Olu* will, in future, be succeeded directly by one of his own sons, though not necessarily the eldest. The *ifa* oracle was also used to determine whether Ginuwa II should be succeeded by one of his sons or by another segment of the royal lineage.

The installation of the *Olu* is a long and complex procedure. Among the more important ceremonies are: seclusion in a village before the coronation day; sacrifice to *umale okun*; the entry into Ode Itsekiri along the royal road; the administration of the oath of allegiance by the *Olu* and announcement of his title by the eldest living man descended from Itsekiri (the man from whom the capital takes its name); the crowning by the incumbent Ologbotsere; homage by chiefs and people, and dancing. Prior to the seclusion the *Olu* elect must be examined by his chiefs for bodily deformities, visit Orugbo for certain rituals, and visit Ijala to bring back the skull of his predecessor for burial near the *capila* (the modern edifice representing the earlier Portuguese chapel).

The burial of an *Olu* is performed by his eldest son at Ijala, the settlement and burial place of Ginuwa.

The most important annual ceremony today is the *Olu*'s return to Ode Itsekiri on each anniversary of his installation. Several minor rituals culminate in an all-night sacrifice to the previous *Olu*. Past *Olu* are not mentioned individually by name, but only collectively; this may account for the discrepancies occurring in the two published king-lists (Moore and the Itsekiri National Society Almanac, 1935) and for the inability of most elders to name, at random, more than half the past rulers.

In the past the *Olu* performed important ceremonies for *umale okun*; he acted as priest, assisted by the Ologbotsere and the eldest male descendant of Itsekiri. No further details are known.

The *Olu* is regularly saluted as *Ogiamé* (meaning, in Edo, "lord of the water"); other ceremonial salutations are reserved for special occasions. The royal dress of the *Olu* is, on some occasions, a gown made of coral beads, together with a high coral collar and crown; and on other occasions a white wrapper, together with a white shirt, with loose sleeves narrowing at the wrist and a white cape over the shoulders, the whole resembling the vestments of a Roman Catholic priest. The chiefs wear a similar dress, adding a red cummerbund around the waist. The *Olu* has two crowns, said to have been brought from Portugal; each is similar to a mediæval English crown and is surmounted by a cross. The present *Olu* frequently wears Yoruba gowns of costly material. He wears coral beads on his wrists and ankles.

²¹ The latter informants elaborate their belief with a legend that an unsuccessful rival of Erejuwa absconded with all the royal regalia; on his accession, Erejuwa, by hard work, restored the wealth of the throne, but was determined as a result that his title should pass to his own son.

Among the paraphernalia of the *Olu* are a large number of swords, similar in shape to those used in Benin. The *Olu* is, in public appearances, always escorted by a boy as sword-bearer.

The Itsekiri are divided into commoners, *amajaja*, and royals, *oton olu*. The designation *oton olu*, rendered as Prince or Princess in English, might only be borne by children of an *Olu* during the reign of his successor; thereafter they and their own children were classed as commoners. How far they continued to trace their descent primarily through the royal lineage or how far they became identified with the patrilineage and descent groups of their mother is not known. Since there is no quarter in Ode Itsekiri set apart for the princes and their descendants, one must presume that they lived in the villages from which their mothers came. Nor is there any burial place for royal princes; many seem to have been interred in the compounds of the patrilineage of their mother. After 1848 descendants of both Erejuwa and Akengbuwa continued to use the title prince, hoping thus to maintain their claims to the throne should a new *Olu* be installed. It would therefore appear that in the past the royals were only a small group; to-day, in contrast, most Itsekiri belong to the descent groups of either Erejuwa or Akengbuwa.

On the death of an *Olu* the palace was occupied by a regent, the *ololu*. He was a senior member of the royal patrilineage, but one who was not likely to be selected as the new *Olu*. His duties were confined to the observance of palace rituals and he probably presided over the selection of candidates for the vacant throne.

The wives of an *Olu* lived in a building near the former palace. It was an offence punishable by death to commit adultery with one of them. The taking of two or more royal princesses as wives or lovers was similarly punished with the death of the man.

The Chiefs

The Itsekiri legends say that Ginuwa came from Benin with seventy chiefs (*ojoye*), each of whom subsequently had his own quarter in Ode Itsekiri. Local historians to-day can remember the titles of less than half of these; Omoneukanrin (largely copying from Moore) gives only 31 titles and six names of persons whose titles have been forgotten (though some of these names are now being adopted as titles).

It is said that most titles were not hereditary and that when a chief died his title was vacant during the remainder of the reign and could only be filled by the succeeding *Olu*. Titles were distributed at the absolute discretion of the *Olu*. Exceptions to these rules are claimed for some of the senior chiefs. The Ologbotsere and Iyatsere titles are said to have been hereditary in principle though legends tell how the *Olu* took the latter title from his original holders and gave it to an immigrant from Ode. Claims that the Ojomo and Uwangué titles were invariably hereditary are countered by legends to the contrary. It is also said that these senior titles were filled on the death of the holder; some of these chiefs, e.g., the Ologbotsere, had important duties at the coronation and the filling of these vacancies could not have been left until after the accession of the new ruler.

No grading of the chiefs is remembered. Ranking, too, is forgotten; the Ologbotsere is usually believed to be senior, followed by the Iyatsere (the Iyatsere claims seniority for himself); there is considerable doubt about the order of seniority of other chiefs. The senior chiefs are believed to have had specific duties: Ologbotsere, the chief adviser of the *Olu*; Iyatsere, the war chief; Uwangué, spokesman for the *Olu*; Olekun, the mediator between the *Olu* and those who offended him; Ojomo, the captain of the army.

The chiefs wear large necklaces of coral beads as a sign of office. Their ceremonial dress is the white outfit described above. On becoming a chief a man

uses primarily the appellation of his title (e.g., Ologbosi—*Ajabo*; Iyatsere—*Uji*) and those of his personal ancestors secondarily.

No women chiefs are known to have existed in the past; none exist at present.

Chieftaincy seems to have been confined to Ode Itsekiri. The settlements founded by the mythical *umale* or before the time of Ginuwa are said, quite emphatically by their present elders, never to have had chiefs among their members. Other old settlements also disclaim participation in the chieftaincy, excepting those founded by chiefs emigrating from Ode Itsekiri and even in these cases the title does not appear to have been retained there, having lapsed completely or been bestowed later on a person in the capital.

The chiefs met as a council, with or without the *Olu* presiding, to advise him on the government of the kingdom, but no further information is available. To-day the new *ojoye* appointed by Ginuwa II and Erejuwa II are attempting to define new functions of chiefs and methods of exercising them which are in keeping with modern systems of local government.

Village Administration

In the village two men are important: the priest (*okpanran*) of the founding ancestor and/or the *umale* especially associated with the town (sometimes each quarter has its own priest), and the oldest male in the village (subject to his competence) known as the village head (*onare aja*).

In new settlements it is the village head who is most in evidence, who presides at meetings and who commands the authority of all. He is usually head of the descent-group or segment for which the village is the residence and family affairs are inseparable from village matters. Many of these villages have their own *umale*, but they are not of great power or importance in the Itsekiri cosmology; the priests of the *umale* often find that their ritual duties do not yield a sufficient income and so they now leave home to work. Their absence when their services are required has tended to reduce their prestige even further. The village head settles all matters by his personal judgment; he has no ritual powers and should he need to consult a diviner, to administer an oath or to give a decision having supernatural sanction, he must seek the services of a reputable priest or practitioner.

The priests operate differently. Their selection is by supernatural agencies; when one dies a watch is kept for any man in the patrilineage of the founder of the settlement for signs of illness, often a mental disorder. The oracle is consulted and may announce that the *umale* has possessed the man so that he should succeed to the priesthood. The illness disappears upon the assumption of his duties by the chosen man. The priest must be above factions and therefore consults his deities and oracles for decisions in contentious cases. He also performs personal services for members of the village, such as divining the cause of sickness. In the oldest Itsekiri settlements the priest is usually the president at all meetings, the duties of the village head being confined to matters affecting his family; this is especially so in towns such as Orugbo and Orere. There, too, the priests, who do not often meet the *Olu*, rank themselves as his equals in status. The priest of Gborodo is in a similar position. In these villages the names of all past priests are often known and correspond to a king-list.

Of the administration of the village nothing more precise can be said than that matters are raised in the family at the lowest level and can be successively discussed in meetings of the segment or the quarter until reaching the village meeting attended by all adult men of the settlement, the decisions of which, announced by the priest or village head, are final. No survey is available of the relative degree of participation at these meetings of members of the patrilineage and of the remainder who trace descent maternally.

The Kingdom

Legends suggest that when the *Olu* settled at Ode Itsekiri he made war on all neighbouring settlements and thus procured their allegiance to him, but there seems to be no indication of the method by which the kingdom thus created was administered.

The chiefs are not remembered to have held jurisdiction over any village outside the capital. No political associations (such as the Yoruba *ogbo*) are universal throughout Itsekiri settlements. The age-grades, described by Omoneukanrin, seem to have been merely a method of designating a man's status and expected duties in his society, i.e., childhood, adolescence, manhood, elder, and old age. (The Itsekiri terms are, respectively, *ometie*, *edema*, *igbele*, *onare*, and *eligbo*.) It is not suggested that members of an age-grade performed any political or ritual activity as an organized group. The *Olu* and his council of chiefs probably acted as a court of appeal from the village meetings; it is not known, however, whether they had original jurisdiction over any offences such as murder or witchcraft, or if the villagers acknowledged and used their right of appeal.

The settlements of the Itsekiri kingdom, therefore, seem to have had a high degree of internal independence. One might suggest as integrating factors among the settlements (a) the size and consequent power of Ode Itsekiri relative to any other settlement; (b) the degree of intermarriage between the settlements;⁸⁸ (c) rituals which are universal such as those for *umale okun* or the principal *umale* (see below), the performance of which was the responsibility not only of the *Olu* but also of the priests in certain villages.

LAW

There seem to have been no councils at which judicial processes as opposed to administration were carried out. In the same meetings, whether of family, quarter, village, or *Olu's* council of chiefs, were discussed all matters of law and government.

Appeals lay progressively from the lowest family meetings to the *Olu* himself, with certain offences probably being heard originally in either the village meeting or the *Olu's* council of chiefs according to their severity.

Omoneukanrin gives a selection of punishments for common offences. The death penalty was awarded for murder, witchcraft, adultery with an *Olu's* wife, and treason. Expiatory sacrifices were ordered for sacrilege and incest. Other cases of adultery were punished with damages and, in common with many other offences, with a fine or banishment into slavery, depending on the social status of the offending and injured parties. The judges of any case heard the evidence and if it was straightforward would give their decision; a difficult case might be submitted to an oracle for guidance. Where the facts of a case continued to be in doubt the judges might order an ordeal. These included (a) the sasswood ordeal—primarily to detect witchcraft, where the guilty party, in dying, thus received the due punishment; (b) the *agbadi* inquest (see below) to detect the cause of death when foul play was suspected; (c) the oath taken before one of the powerful *umale* (see below) to swear the truth of one's own statements; the sickness or death which might result were here the punishment for perjury and not for the original action which was often an action for damages or debt. The offences mentioned above, excepting the ritual offences, are now heard in Native Courts or Magistrates' and High Courts where the penalties are fixed by Ordinance.

⁸⁸ In the old settlements elders give prominence in the genealogies to daughters of the village founders who became mothers or grandmothers of an *Olu*; other genealogies show that these settlements also provided a fair quota of the wives of the powerful chiefs such as Ologboasere Eyinmisaren.

WARFARE

In addition to the conquest of the settlements near Ode Itsekiri, the Itsekiri army, according to legend, once campaigned against the Ijaw at Nembe. There is no information on the recruitment or organization of such an army.

The fleets of war canoes armed with cannons, which in the 19th century were often in operation in the Itsekiri creeks, were the private forces of wealthy traders. They used them to protect their own settlements and their trading posts, to clear the creeks of Ijaw pirates, to maintain peace on the rivers of Urhobo country, and also to settle quarrels between one another.

SLAVERY

The Itsekiri chiefs and traders had many domestic slaves (*eru*). In the mid-19th century Diare was estimated to have 600 at Jakpa and Nana, later, to have 5,000 at Ebrohimi. All slaves were non-Itsekiri, being mainly Urhobo, Yoruba, and Benin.

The Itsekiri claim that they never raided for slaves and this seems to be true. They purchased them in the Yoruba and Benin slave markets on their frontiers (these slaves being war captives exported southwards), from the Ijaw pirates who seized defenceless canoes, and from the Urhobo and Kwale who sold into slavery their tribesmen convicted of certain serious crimes. From the Urhobo they received children as security for trade advances and sometimes in settlement of debts. In expeditions to capture runaway slaves others might be seized as reprisals. Slaves appointed by their masters to positions of trust, such as control of a trading post, often abused it and seized persons without much justification.

Slaves were used as farm labour, as paddlers in war canoes, and in canoes bringing produce from the interior and sand and clay for house building from near Benin. It was possible for a slave to advance in his master's esteem and to be used as a trading agent; such a man would himself own slaves. Nana placed several of his biggest trading posts on the Ethiope River in the charge of his senior slaves.

When a slave man and slave woman married their children were slaves and the property of the master (slaves of different masters might not marry unless the masters agreed to a sale or exchange so that the two slaves became the property of a single master). A free man might take a slave woman; if the slave was his own or belonged to a full brother or sister (*omere ifun*) or even, some informants say, to any *omere* within three generations, the children were free born; they might try to disguise their mother's stigma by claiming maternal descent through the mother of their father; they might also redeem their mother by a cash payment to their father or other owner. If the free man took a slave belonging to a person bearing an *egusa* relationship to him, or to a non-related person, and did not purchase or redeem her, the children belonged to the mother and were hence slaves, the property of her master. If a free woman married a slave (he would probably be a wealthy man) the children were free and lived in their mother's village, participating in its ceremonies in a manner similar to a mulatto. They, too, would attempt to hide their slave descent. Slaves who were the children of slaves were known as *ibi edo*—house members; this term is now used instead of "slave", the use of which in addressing a person may lead to a court action for slander.

There is no way by which a slave, even if redeemed, can gain membership by adoption of a patrilineage or descent-group; a slave can only assure it for his children by union with a free born person.

MAIN CULTURAL FEATURES

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Itsekiri are often described as a tall light-skinned people, whose women especially are handsome. Inter-marriage with neighbouring peoples has however

made it impossible that any "pure" Itsekiri type should exist. Apart from the mulattos (born of recent mixed marriages) many Itsekiri have less negroid features, perhaps attributable to distant European ancestry. They say that they can distinguish their own people from the Urhobo by their carriage in walking; the Itsekiri hold themselves upright and proudly. They also have a reputation for personal cleanliness (an attribute said to recommend their women to Europeans and educated Africans); the sanitation in their villages is of a high standard, latrines often being sited far from the village and always over flowing water.

The usual facial marks of the Itsekiri were until recently—for the custom is fast dying—three small vertical cuts below each eye, often together with small lines radiating from the corners of the eyes towards the ears, these being known locally as "fowl toes". Women sometimes had other marks for personal adornment, such as a row of X-shaped marks around the neck.

DRESS

The Itsekiri have always been well dressed, their women being particular not to expose in public even their breasts; the Itsekiri usually ridicule their neighbours for their nakedness. Fashions have changed over the years; at the beginning of this century the black top hat was favoured. To-day the Itsekiri men wear a wrapper—4-6 yds. of cloth—which is tied elaborately at the left of the waist, reaches the ankles and has a train which is carried over the arm or left shoulder; a European shirt is worn with its tail outside the wrapper; a straw hat (boater) with a feather completes the outfit. The women wear a close-fitting blouse of European style with two wrappers—a larger one from the waist to the ankle and a smaller one reaching to just below the knee; a brightly coloured silk scarf is used as a head tie. Imported singlets are used by both sexes; men wear khaki shorts as underwear and also for working. Conventional European dress is also common, though not so slavishly copied as by clerks at the beginning of this century.

THE LIFE CYCLE²³

Birth

A pregnant woman carries a bell around her waist to warn people not to bump into her and to keep the child active in the womb. She observes any food taboos respected by her husband. When delivery approaches the husband sends the wife a cloth and orders the unborn child to come out quickly; a difficult birth causes suspicion and leads to accusations that the husband is not the father of the child; in her pain the woman is then expected to confess her adultery with a lover. The ancestors of the husband are thought to punish both the child and its mother if the child claimed descent from him when he was not the genitor.

Birth takes place in the compound in which the mother lives at the time; the afterbirth is buried in the gutter outside with little ceremony. After seven days the father names his child and gives it presents. Cutting facial marks is often left for the mother to arrange.

Male children are circumcised within a few weeks of birth and without ceremony; females were not circumcised, the reason given by the Itsekiri being simply that Ginuwa did not bring from Benin a woman skilled in this operation.

Twins and abnormal children were formerly thrown in the bush and the parents declared to be ritually unclean until they had produced a normal child.

Youth

On the birth of second and subsequent children a mother often sends her older child to live with one of its grandparents. It is said that a woman cannot care for

²³ Several sociologically important customs at birth, marriage, and death have already been mentioned in *Social Organisation*, pp. 182-81 above.

more than one child at a time,²⁴ and also that the aged grandparents need someone to perform errands and especially to run for help should they fall ill at night. A youth thus travels widely and often forms closer ties with maternally related kin groups than with his father's patrilineage.

Marriage

The rules of exogamy, the ceremony performed for the ancestors, and the gifts of gin if the girl was a virgin have been mentioned above (pp. 180-91). Omoneukanrin gives fuller details of marriage customs.

Partly because of the difficulty of finding a girl not closely related to them, Itsekiri men often take wives from neighbouring tribes; Urhobo wives are supposed to be faithful and industrious, qualities said to be absent in Itsekiri women. Itsekiri women are sought after by the men of neighbouring tribes for their beauty and cleanliness. In Jakpa a survey of school children showed that few had non-Itsekiri parents. Mixed marriage is more common in Warri (and presumably Sapele); in Warri 1,500 children were questioned as to their parents' tribe; the resulting figures were adjusted to give a sample of 1,000 children in which each tribe was represented according to the estimated number of its children in the town.

MOTHERS

FATHERS		<i>Itsekiri</i>	<i>Urhobo</i>	<i>Ibo</i>	<i>Other</i> ²⁵	<i>Total</i>
	<i>Itsekiri</i>	114	33	—	3	150
	<i>Urhobo</i>	25	320	4	11	360
	<i>Ibo</i>	—	3	302	5	310
	<i>Other</i>	27	11	3	139	180
	<i>Total</i>	166	367	309	168	1,000

Thus, of 150 children with Itsekiri fathers, 114 have Itsekiri mothers and 33 have Urhobo mothers. The common belief that the Itsekiri are being swamped as a tribe by the Urhobo seems incorrect. Children of Urhobo women with Itsekiri fathers are brought up as Itsekiri, and although they can often speak Urhobo and sometimes visit their mother's home they never claim to be Urhobo. Itsekiri women married away, however, often return home bringing their children with them; these grow up as Itsekiri, though born to "other" fathers.

The Itsekiri woman is often stereotyped as promiscuous. This, too, is false; many Urhobo and Ibo prostitutes in the large modern towns who come from Delta Province claim to be Itsekiri for the enhanced prestige which this gives. Itsekiri marriage is however often unstable for, as explained above, many unions are of concubinage only. Not only is it easy for a woman to break the bonds of marriage (or concubinage) but she is usually able to live independently, since many Itsekiri women become wealthy as traders and most can be self-supporting from fishing or craft industries. Indeed, the Itsekiri are sometimes criticized for allowing their young men to live permanently off their mothers' incomes. Thus the Itsekiri woman is a person of independent character and husbands often complain of the difficulty of keeping wives obedient to their will. After passing the age of childbirth an emigrant woman often returns home to an Itsekiri settlement. Warri seems to have

²⁴ With the absence of most women from a village on fishing expeditions and the difficulty of coping with several children in a canoe, this may be a valid point.

²⁵ Other = mainly Yoruba, Bini, Sierra Leone, and Gold Coast or European.

an unusually high number of middle-aged Itsekiri women, some widows, but many merely separated from their husbands who live, with their children, on the income from their trading or house property.

Death

Before an Itsekiri dies he or she is expected to confess all sins, for the ancestors will not receive anyone with faults unconfessed.

The body of a deceased person should be interred in the burial ground of his patrilineage. Thus those who trace descent from a chief at Ode Itsekiri are buried in the compound associated with him at the capital; all those descended patrilineally from Ologbotere Eyinnisaren, for instance, are buried at Eghoro-egbin; different segments of the lineage have their own houses, beneath the floor of which the corpse is interred. People of Omadina are buried in the village; those of Gborodo at a place near Ogidigben which is said to be the site of the earliest settlement of these people in the Escravos Estuary.

Whenever it is impracticable to carry the corpse to its burial place, it is interred at the place of the death, but the hair and nails are removed and these, wrapped in white cloth, represent the body in a second burial in the lineage grave.

Corpses which are unclean (having visible ulcers or sores), suicides, deaths from drowning or in childbirth are not buried in the lineage grave, but thrown into the bush. Bodies of witches, confessed or discovered by ordeal, are similarly disposed of.

If the body of the deceased was not available or if death occurred in a strange land and the hair and nails were not removed, a ceremony might be performed "to call the soul home". A palm branch was taken to the creek at high tide, and the departed soul called; it is believed that the spirit entered into the palm branch which was then buried as if it were the hair and nails.

If death is thought to have been caused by witchcraft or poison, the *agbadi* ritual is performed. Four men carry a ladder to which the hair and nails in the white cloth are tied. Through the efforts of a priest the four men become entranced (it is said that the deceased has entered into the package on the ladder) and either nod in unison forwards or sideways in answer to questions put by the priest, or run through the village ultimately striking the person or the house of the individual who has caused the death. He then confesses and is judged and punished by the elders. This custom is now rare among the Itsekiri, but it is markedly similar to an Ijaw ritual still performed.

Dancing and drumming and sacrifices to the ancestors form a major part of the burial ceremonies; they are performed on the day of interment, on the second burial of the hair and nails, and at 7, 14, and 28 days from the death. They are an occasion for ostentatious display by the kin of the deceased; in the past they are said often to have cost several hundreds of pounds.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

THE SUPREME DEITY

The supreme deity is *oritse*, who created the world; his symbol is a bamboo staff whitened with chalk, with a yam in the forked end and a string of cowries and either a white cloth or a white chicken tied to it. A modern symbol of *oritse* is a wooden cross draped with a white cloth. Such a symbol is placed in a compound and offerings of water or coconut juice made to it. The Itsekiri do not usually address prayers to *oritse*, though the name is sometimes used in informal oaths, and no important ceremonies seem to be connected with the deity.

Umale okun AND OTHER DEITIES

Umale okun is the god of the sea. Ceremonies were held in the past at which the *Olu* presided, assisted by the *Ologbotsere* and the senior male patrilineal descendant of *Itsekiri*. Little is now known about these. *Umale okun* is the principal deity at *Ogheye*, at the mouth of the Benin River, and is also important at *Ureju*. *Ogiden*, a small fish, is believed to be the messenger of *umale okun*, and it is forbidden for any members of the patrilineage of *Itsekiri* of *Irigbo* to eat it. People may pray individually to the deity at a creek or by spreading a white cloth before a dish of water.

Ogun is the god of iron and war; he is, as with the Yoruba, associated with *Ire*, an *Ekiti* town. A dog is often sacrificed and its blood, or that of another animal, is dropped on to all iron implements which require blessing.

Ale aja is the earth deity; when a new compound is being built a tree may be planted to invoke the deity's protection.

The priest at *Ogheye* is priest for *umale okun*, but the other deities do not seem to have a regular priesthood.

LESSER SPIRITS

Throughout the creeks one finds small bamboo tables with a broken cup or dish and an offering of kola or some food. These are to spirits who are believed to reside in the creeks and to which one sacrifices for one's personal safety. Each of these little shrines is the personal property of an individual or a small number of persons.

THE *Umale*

The *umale* are deified earlier inhabitants of the country and range from the most important, who are revered throughout *Itsekiri* country, to minor ones which seem to have little religious function but which are the excuse for a dance. Myths usually describe them as sub-human beings, the first settlers of the villages, who then disappeared into the creeks without trace. The *Itsekiri* now say that having driven these beings away their ancestors felt remorseful and so began to worship them. Each town thus has one or two *umale* associated with its foundation.

The *umale* are represented by masqueraders at annual ceremonies and on certain other ritual occasions. A man is almost completely covered with cloth, except for his feet, which are coloured with camwood; he has rattles on his ankles and a headpiece, sometimes of carved wood, which is tall and distinguishes the *umale* from all others. Some of these headpieces are copied (and acknowledged to be so) from the *Ijaw*. The *umale* dances between rows of women, also dancing, to the drummers at the end of the square; the master drummer leads the *umale* in his dances. Other men not disguised follow the *umale*.

The *umale* also appears from a sacred grove where most of his paraphernalia is kept. Non-initiates are forbidden to enter the grove. The *umale* has a priest, often the head of the village. Men, on payment of a fee to the priest, may be taken into the grove and initiated into the secrets of the *umale* and may then wear the masquerade. It is now said that one may join the society of any *umale* and not merely that associated with one's patrilineage; one may also join several such societies, but the *umale* of *Gborodo* is said to be more strict and its own members may not do this. It is not known whether these societies had in the past any political function or indeed any social function besides permitting the members to take part in the annual dances.

As described above (p. 194), the priests are selected by the *umale*, the sickness of a person being divined as the sign that the *umale* has made its choice.

Three *umale*—*Ibrikimo* (associated with the *Olu* and with *Orugbo*), *Gbasala* (associated with the *Iyatsere*), and *Inama* (associated with the *Ologbotsere*)—occupy

a special place in Itsekiri beliefs. They are used to swear the most dreaded oaths. A person who has been offended, e.g., by the theft of goods or the seduction of a wife, may say, "May Ibrikimo take his —" and mention the house, belly, or genitals of the wrongdoer, who will then surely suffer in the manner indicated unless he confesses and begs for the removal of the curse. If a man thinks he has been wrongly cursed he may now appeal to the Native Court and the judges will order the curse to be revoked by the person imposing it.

In the Itsekiri Native Courts the oath was taken on these *umale* until the mid-1930s. If the two parties could not agree on the facts of the case and if the judges could not easily decide which version to accept, either one of the parties or the judges could ask the other party to swear to a particular statement. Usually the other party quickly revised his statement (giving the judges little doubt in their decision), but if he refused the judges would order that the parties go to the priest of Ibrikimo and, at the shrine, swear to the truth of their statements before the *umale*. The death of the liar was believed to be almost certain. These oaths are still greatly feared, but they are no longer used in the Native Courts where one may now lie with apparent impunity. Literate Itsekiri often describe these *umale* as their "policemen"—they prevent all wrongdoing in the community.

THE *Ifa* ORACLE

Ifa, similar to the Yoruba oracle, but said to have been brought by Idibien, a magician who led Ginuwa to Ijala, is commonly used. It has no priesthood, but anyone may learn the art; some men are known to be more skilled in it than others and these are more often consulted. There are other forms of divination also manipulated by laymen.

ANCESTOR WORSHIP (*ebura*)

When a man died his eldest son was usually appointed to be his priest (*akpanran*) and in this capacity he would wear the clothes and any symbols of office held by his father (including those held by his father as priest of his own father and so on) and sit in the family shrine. Such a man must never have committed any wrong against the ancestors—especially incest; it is now assumed that no adult man is likely to be so blameless and a small boy is usually dressed up as the priest. A daughter is priest of a deceased woman.

Annually, and at other occasions as required, ceremonies are performed to the ancestors. The priest of the family sits on an ornate chair in the centre of the shrine with a table before him. In a complicated ritual, said to have been copied in part from the Roman Mass, other members of the family act as servers and assistants to bring the food and drink and later to remove it. The priest offers the dish of food so provided to the ancestors, praying for the health of their descendants. All those who are present during such a ceremony are at its close marked on the forehead with white chalk. The skulls of animals sacrificed are usually hung in or near the shrine; it is common for persons to dip a hand into the animal's blood and make a stain of a hand with fingers extended on the wall to remind the ancestors of the ceremony.

Large shrines have been erected for most of the wealthy men of the late 19th century. At these their numerous descendants vie with other descent-groups in costly ceremonies; the lavishness is measured by the number of dancers and drummers and the richness of the heirlooms, of coral and silver, exhibited on the members of the group. In the old settlements the big ceremonies are done solely for the founders of the villages, though every man may hold some ceremony in his house for his own father or grandfather.

While the *umale* are said to be responsible for the safety and prosperity of the towns and for the punishment of offences outside the kin-group such as perjury or

seduction, the ancestors are invoked whenever the lineage or descent-group is wronged, as when incest is committed, food taboos not observed, or when children do not acknowledge the patrilineage into which they were born.

WITCHCRAFT

The Itsekiri believe strongly in evil done by witches who are said to form societies into which one may be initiated at any age. The members meet secretly, almost always for the purpose of doing harm. The punishment for witchcraft was death. Witches were detected by the *agbadi* ritual, by the sasswood ordeal, and by confession. It is believed that if a witch died and met his ancestors with his actions unconfessed he would be severely punished; a witch should therefore make a full confession on the deathbed, even though this means that the corpse will be thrown into the bush and the name of the person blotted out from memory.

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